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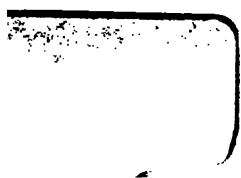
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# THE AWAKENING



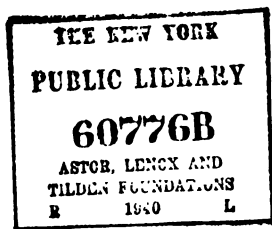


# THE AWAKENING

A Novel of Washington Life

BY  
C. WICKLIFFE YULEE

NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON  
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY  
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## CHAPTER I

### A PUZZLING ADVENTURE

FEELING no force of upheaval, Montresor, a philosophic atom in a most unphilosophic chaos, rested calmly where he first found himself in the struggle for existence. There, seated upon a pile of rugs, he looked about him with discriminating abstraction.

Men, women, children, boxes, hold-alls, dogs, cats and bird-cages had been hurled together upon the deck in a promiscuous, topsy-turvy manner such as never existed save in a child's Noah's Ark, or in that relic of a bygone age, the "tender," which at that period—the eighties of the nineteenth century—conveyed passengers from the Liverpool docks to the ocean steamers at anchor in the Mersey.

The fellow-atom which first attracted his attention was, as ever in true philosophy, one which had caused most commotion in his own vicinity, a belated second-cabin passenger, top-heavy with many stirrup-cups—or capstan-cups. He was shoved aboard at the last minute, with boisterous, laughing farewells, by convivial friends, who, taking advantage of his obliviousness to detail, had pasted upon his back a luggage-label having the word "Hold" printed in large red letters.

Montresor watched him buffeted about, and, with an amused smile, pondered seriously how a man who



could so poorly care for himself in the Old World would fare in the New, to which they were going. Had fate seized upon this disreputable apostle to carry a message of warning to devious explorers on the broad road leading to destruction?

The object of his reflection staggered to the forward deck, answering with unconscious wink the laughter which greeted him, and, dumping himself lumpily upon a box, lunged from side to side in efforts to preserve connection with his rolling head.

Montresor now allowed his eyes to wander leisurely about until they rested upon a bright, handsome girl, who, in company with two other women, stood rigidly upright in the center of the deck, posing in resolute protest against their discomfort. They were all in costumes fresh from the fashion plates, that of the one Montresor regarded being so horsey—billycock hat, fox-head scarf-pin, square-shouldered covert coat and Newmarket check—that one might have thought a ride across the Atlantic was intended, but for the incongruity of an enormous bustle. The eldest of the trio stared in silent disdain through a lorgnon—which she removed when she really wished to see—or else haughtily questioned a maid in that French which an Englishman hears, in Paris, only at the circus when his countrymen are being burlesqued, but which seems so much more intelligible to him than the other kind.

The daughters—for their indifferent attitudes indicated such a relation—gave no heed to Montresor, but were apparently discussing the appearance and identity of another man, who had already attracted notice by his blatant importance as he stalked down the gang-plank, followed by a sedulous valet bear-



ing a new dressing-bag, branded with the letter M. He wore his flaxen beard in the same fashion as the Prince of Wales, desiring, perhaps, to promote a fancied resemblance, any such design being frustrated, however, by plebeian features and rude manners of the caricaturish kind adopted by foolish apes who fancy that in showing deference to no one they resemble those exalted persons to whom every one defers.

Montresor's idly contemplative interest in these persons suddenly received an acute accentuation from overhearing one of the younger women remark, apropos of the imitation prince:

"There is only one M. on board, so he must be the Honorable Arthur Montresor."

They were consulting a printed passenger list, and, as Montresor had one of these, he found that, sure enough, his name was the only male M. upon it; so that the flaxen-bearded man must have booked very recently or else have borrowed the bag. Even philosophers have idiosyncrasies, and Montresor could not help at first a slight feeling of resentment at being personated by such a creature, although he ended by enjoying the mistake and indulging his imagination in all sorts of vicarious adventures.

It was this, probably, which prevented him for some time from noticing the irate glances of a short, stout man, walking about, indulging in a monologue of smothered snorts, and angrily tugging at a crisp mustache. He was seemingly in such anxiety to impress his dignity upon others as to forget it himself, and his ire arose from the fact that he saw Montresor seated upon a roll of rugs plainly marked with a T, and belonging to himself—Mr. Thompson.

Finally Montresor did observe the stern gaze, but attributed it to a friendly, if ill-mannered, interest. This view was dispelled when, the tender having churned, with vulgar familiarity, alongside of the huge steamer, there was a general stir, and Mr. Thompson, marching up to him, said, brusquely:

"Those are my rugs, sir, and I'll trouble you to get up."

Montresor's tranquil surprise and even-toned "I hope I have not damaged your rugs" seemed to abash the other somewhat, who murmured:

"The b-luggage is so mixed I don't blame you."

Then, realizing that it was not he who should have given this excuse, he grew red with baffled importance, and, returning Montresor's grave bow with a twisted nod, joined the three women, ranging himself as the head of the family by the familiar manner in which he stood to windward and puffed tobacco smoke into their faces.

His man-servant having been left to follow later, Montresor was obliged to look out for his own things, as he had often done before. Rescuing them from the ship's men—whose habit is a strictly communal apportionment—he was, by an easy stratagem, one of the first to leave the tender, and, knowing from a deck plan the situation of his cabin, he went straight to it. There he put everything to rights snugly, and emerged upon deck while many others were still in the turmoil of exploration.

None of the people whom I have mentioned saw much of each other until the next afternoon, when they were at sea; but there had been encounters enough to show that the Misses Thompson took an

interest in the false Montresor which they withheld from the real. Yet the latter was considered personally attractive by most women—assuredly by those who knew him.

Although his well-bronzed complexion and sandy-brown hair theoretically would suggest monotony, in reality his face had marked individuality. With just enough good looks to enjoy its advantages, he escaped the distasteful éclat of a reputation for it. His figure was of a sinewy slenderness, upon which his clothes hung loosely, yet distinctively, being worn with a careless ease which made new and old seem contemporaneous. At rest, in his greenish-brown eyes could be seen imaginative dreaminess, joined with a natural, untroubled questioning which suggested immaturity; but, when called upon to act, his look became alert and his movements showed confident decisiveness. Although fastidious in the choice of intimates, his general bearing toward both acquaintances and strangers was one of open friendliness. It had been said of his father, the Earl of Broadlands, that he possessed both a "kind heart *and* a coronet." Montresor had surely inherited the first, with the possibility, once removed, of the other—for he was the younger of two brothers.

At the age of thirty he had seen many lands and many things, but had never been to America, which great void he was now about to fill. A cousin, who was a prominent member of the British Cabinet, upon learning of the intended trip, was enthusiastically in its favor, and, with the desire to draw Montresor into public life, he proposed a secret mission to report upon the real feeling of conservative and influential Americans toward certain phases of the Irish ques-

tion—just then in an acute stage. This was to be an absolutely private matter between themselves, unless the course of events should make it advisable to inform the Premier. Being an astute man of the world, he relied upon the active positivism of the Americans to correct in Montresor a smiling impartiality in his view of men, motives and events which, although totally removed from indifference or cynicism, yet materially delayed the formation of character. Life was to him an unending debate, never a thesis. The traditions of his historic family—one prolific in numbers and talent—would have long before impelled him into Parliament but that a critically candid mind found too many faults in the great party with which his name was indissolubly connected to permit enlistment, and not enough to justify desertion. So he remained a looker-on, passed by the crowds in each direction.

Another object in his journey had relation to a suit brought by American claimants against a part of his mother's property. This will be explained later.

The ship was followed by a rising southeasterly sea when Montresor came on deck, and, finding his chair appropriated, he joined that tedious throng of promenaders who walk either to show they are not ill, or else because they think it is a means of prevention. Presently he collided with the flaxen-bearded stranger, who answered his civil apology by a frigid silence and a pained monocle-stare, thus delighting Montresor's sense of humor with the paradox of his hypothetical self treating his real self with disdain. It must be confessed, however, that he sometimes winced with an absurd sense of responsibility when

this "counterfeit presentment" did anything particularly flagrant.

After taking a few more turns Montresor noticed as he was passing Miss Thompson that her rug had been displaced by the wind, and, as she seemed incapable of arranging it, he offered to do so, but was stiffly rebuffed. A few minutes later a similar offer by his other self was most graciously received, and there ensued an amicable conversation of that monosyllabic and inanimate character supposed, at the period of which I write, to be the correct thing in very high life.

"The Sphinx has been made to speak, I see," said some one at his shoulder, whom, upon turning, he found to be a New Yorker named Bridgmond. They had met at Cannes the preceding winter, and, to the satisfaction of each, had renewed their acquaintance soon after leaving Liverpool.

"Yes," answered Montresor, "he seems more fortunate than I; but I suppose eagles must find their mates."

"A very polite paraphrase for birds of a feather," remarked Bridgmond, "but he is flocking with very ordinary birds of my own country. Thompson, the father, started his life, or his fortune, which is the same thing, as a general storekeeper in the Rocky Mountains, selling whiskey, but not drinking, and therefore making shrewd bargains. Then a railway contractor—a railway president—and a Chicago banker. Later he came to New York, where he bought for himself a seat on the Stock Exchange and for his family a place in our smart set."

"I have much curiosity," said Montresor, "as to the social habits of Americans at home."

"You won't find much difference between our society and yours," replied Bridgmond. "When you drop in to tea you will be admitted by an English footman, find the men and women dressed in English clothes, will drink what we call English breakfast tea, and discuss the latest London scandal."

"That is not the sort of thing I had in mind," said Montresor, "but the way in which your social lines are drawn. It has puzzled me to find one family cultivated and refined moving apparently in the same set with another exactly the reverse. This might happen with us if the father were given a peerage for politics or charities, carrying a sort of official right to upper society, especially if he learned to drop his old friends and not his h's. But you haven't that in America. At first I thought it might be a case of money, of which we have examples in London, but I have met other families from the same place, quite as wealthy and more cultivated than their vulgar neighbors, who yet seemed of less social importance."

"It may have depended," Bridgmond answered, "upon the kind of business the father was in. In some towns the butcher and baker combine to frown down the candlestick-maker, while in others the baker joins the candlestick-maker to keep the butcher in the cold. In fact, society in our big cities is a trades-union; a lot of people get together, apparently by accident, resolving they will constitute society. Strange to say, the others all immediately acquiesce, although they may possess more ancestry, talent and even money; but they are never content until they are taken into the union. I speak freely because on one side I am a Knickerbocker, with a lot of mala-

rious Hudson land, and on the other I am ship-chandlery—a sort of candlestick-maker.”

This was said in an offhand, American, “thinking aloud” manner, differing from the egotism of the Frenchman or the lofty ignoring of one’s opinion sometimes shown by an Englishman’s rash confidences.

They started to walk together, and approached the almost deserted bow, for the sea, which had been growing heavier ever since they left Fastnet Light, broke now and then over the deck, driving nearly every one either below or to the after part of the ship. One man, however, was standing there with that peculiar ease which long practice at sea gives. Protected by a mackintosh, he seemed to derive enjoyment from the dash of the spray and the promise of a rising storm. Of medium height, could one have looked under his mackintosh, his sturdy, well-knit frame would have shown a suggestion of fleshiness out of keeping with his alertness. His eye was of a cold gray, but upon the whole his face gave an impression of goodness, almost of innocence. Addressing Bridgmond, he said:

“If you are going into the pool on the run I advise a low number, as this storm will play the devil with the high ones. It looks as if we were going into the south half of a cyclone—laying our course too near the center for my fancy.”

“I don’t see,” said Bridgmond, “why the winds of a cyclone should move faster in the center. The hub of a wheel isn’t as fast as the tire.”

“Oh,” responded the other, “let me change your illustration. It is like the water going out of a bathtub, only upside down, the vortex being in one case



where the air is being sucked into the upper regions and in the other where it is being sucked down into the pipe. Don't smile—if a tempest in a teapot, why not a cyclone in a bathtub?"

Montresor, feeling interested, asked other questions, but Bridgmond interrupted, saying:

"If you go on picking this storm to pieces and explaining it away there will be no use in our being good sailors."

Laughingly protesting that he was not a believer in compulsory education, the stranger nodded to Bridgmond and went below.

"He seems to be a bit of a sailor," commented Montresor.

"Perhaps," replied Bridgmond, non-committally. "He is a—a lawyer and claim agent, making a specialty of financial promotion and bills before Congress—in fact, a sort of high-toned and high-priced—if that isn't tautology—lobbyist. His name is Robinson, but I know him only slightly. One meets him, however, everywhere, especially in Washington."

That evening in the smoking-room Robinson took the lead upon every subject, discussing each glibly and entertainingly, but superficially.

After a while, rising to light a fresh cigar, he moved about aimlessly, eventually taking a seat sufficiently near Montresor to speak to him without giving the appearance of having joined him.

"You see I proved myself a true prophet," he said, presently, "and we are going to have still heavier weather before long. I will predict, and back my prediction, that to-morrow we shall be cooped up below and not allowed on deck. I have half a notion

to go up about midnight and take a look out, as I have not often the chance of seeing really heavy weather at night on one of these big steamers."

"I have never done so at all," replied Montresor, with more interest than he had yet shown.

"It is a glorious sight," continued Robinson. "It really seems to be a battle with the Powers of Darkness. I am not poetical, but I enjoy it as much as a poet—perhaps more, because I am never seasick, and poets sometimes are. I have never seen anything which impresses me as much—not the Laocoön, nor the Matterhorn, nor my tailor's bill."

Soon leaving this topic, he proceeded in a half-serious, half-jesting vein upon all sorts of things. But his reference to the fascination of a storm at night had caught Montresor's imagination, who constantly referred to it, succeeding, however, in getting only such short answers as showed Robinson's indifference, and still further piqued his own curiosity.

By eleven o'clock the main saloon, in which Montresor had been writing, was deserted. Having finished his letter, he went to his cabin; but the straining of the vessel and that singing vibration which announces a gale reminded him so forcibly of what Robinson had said that, putting on a mackintosh, he climbed the swaying companionway and went on deck.

He was a good sailor, but was obliged to hold on to the side of the companion-door upon first passing out. Then, getting well on his "sea legs," he started forward. At first the storm seemed not half so fierce as it did below, where he could feel the ship quivering after each blow of the mighty sea. In a little while he lost the sense of being upon a vessel, seem-

ing to identify himself with some great Thing. They were not meeting a succession of waves, but wrestling with a huge black serpent which wound its folds around them, tossing about in its efforts to crush, emitting all the time a baleful, sinister hissing. Now the folds would tighten, now they would relax, then would come a strong, convulsive strain that was like a blow.

After a time, with a touch of foolhardiness—which often attacked him when there were no on-lookers—he went to the side of the ship and peered over the rail. Here the sensation was different. Over and over again he felt as one does when rising or falling in a dream—the same slow start, with rapidly increasing rush through the air, and then that incomprehensible stop just before reaching destruction.

Had the monster with which they contended swallowed them, the darkness could scarcely have been greater; but through it he presently distinguished a lumpy knot which gradually assumed the shape of a man, with a dull sheen, as from oilskins, impressing latently upon his preoccupied perception the notion that it was a sailor.

Whatever it was, it could not be said to inspire comradeship, nor even ordinary sociability; yet Montresor shouted, affably:

“A rather dusty night!” using an American humorous inversion.

Amid the tumbling, incoherent sounds were some like “fool” and “overboard.” Perhaps none such were uttered—only a subliminal echo of Montresor’s own obtrusive common-sense.

At any rate, he made no further advances, and was

soon relieved of temptation to do so by the heaving zig-zag merging into surrounding blankness, and utter disappearance of this surly mariner—or creature of his imagination.

The deck thus cleared and his fancy left in solitary supremacy, the contest assumed new variety and intensity, becoming still more personal in its nature. No fasting monk in his cell, no young squire in the probationary vigil of his knighthood, ever indulged in a fiercer orgy of combat against more desperate and malign assault.

Do we have presentiments of danger, or are they mere coincidences? Perhaps most of them are nothing more than flashes of mental activity, initiated by the very act they portend, but of such rapidity and detail that, in looking back, they seem to have preceded it. As with the soldier Abercrombie mentions, who, dropping to sleep momentarily, had a long dream of many incidents, culminating in his trial, sentence and execution—all induced by the very shot which awoke him in terror.

Yielding to an uncanny foreboding, and a sense of something approaching from behind, Montresor was turning, when he was suddenly grasped in strong arms and bent over the rail, while a hand closed his mouth, and his feet, by a rapid and skillful movement, were struck from under him. Down he looked into the black abyss, this time with a certainty that the sickening fall would end only with his life. His thoughts reverted, as in such moments they always do, to every variety of incident in the past—and went on into the future. What would they say at home when they heard he was lost, and how would they mourn for him? He wondered

if any one would realize the terrors of such a death—the death into which he was going.

All the while, however, he was grasping doggedly at anything and everything, and in the struggle he got one hand firmly fixed in the netting, while the other arm clung around the neck of his assailant. He felt the cords in it—for it was partially bare—hard and set as if made of bronze—their outline cutting deep into his dazed memory.

At this instant the ship seemed to stop and reel as if stricken—there were a few moments of silence—the wind and sea were all for an instant stunned and motionless—then came a roaring, rushing sound along the deck as the vessel quickly started into life again. The next moment they were submerged in water, which came pouring over them in a great torrent. The arms around him loosened their hold, and, with dumb brute instinct, he grasped the netting with both hands, while an endless ocean seemed to sweep over him—his brain in a blurring confusion resembling unconsciousness.

Then, recovering himself, he realized that the sea they had shipped was a thing of the past and he was saved. Looking for his assailant, he could see nothing of him.

With a strong sense of outrage, unheeding the danger to which he was still exposed, he started off in the hope of finding him. But immediately a ship's officer, just on deck, ordered him below—such were "the orders of the captain." For a moment his impulse was to tell of his adventure and ask assistance in his search; but everything was comparatively quiet now, and the officer so cool and matter-of-fact, that he knew such a tale would appear ridiculous, or, at

most, would be ascribed to some skylarking trick which a practical joker had played upon him. So he contented himself with asking if any damage had been done by the sea they had shipped. The officer replied he was not aware they had shipped a sea; a little more water than usual had dashed over the deck—that was all. Accustomed to this belittling of the weather—until after the voyage—he did not contest the point.

On the companionway he met Robinson coming from the other side.

"You appear to have acted on my advice," said he, "and have probably seen the storm. I no sooner came on deck than I was ordered below, so they must have had some heavy seas already, and"—noticing the wet condition of Montresor—"by Jove! you can tell me something about it."

Again Montresor thought of communicating what had happened and seeking advice as to investigating it; but, besides the reasons constraining him from confiding in the officer, there was a want of congeniality between Robinson and himself which kept him silent. He only answered that he had been out for some time, and the water came on so freely he should call it a sea, if not contradicted by those in authority.

He removed his wet clothes mechanically, and was in his berth before realizing how much the incident had told upon him. Robinson's matter-of-fact conversation, the well-lighted cabin, and the sight of a sleepy steward serving a couple who had the effrontery to be eating a Welsh rarebit, produced the same effect upon him as coming out into the daylight after a melodramatic matinee performance.

Safe in his snug cabin, he assured himself it could not have been a case of attempted assassination—only on the stage did such things occur—and in Italy, where there was a murder for each day in the year. Once in his berth, before dismissing the subject, he felt bound to admit that even in Great Britain and *Ireland* there were murders taking place. His mission upon the Irish question inevitably intruded upon him in his search for the vital essence of such crime—its motive. For it could not be “worth while to those few men in his own class who disliked him—whose extreme expression of hatred would be, “I don’t care for him.” As for enemies among the lower classes, he was certain he had none. Upon analysis, however, the Irish mission was palpably preposterous as a clue. No one but his cousin and himself could know of it, for their discussions had taken place when out shooting, or at family gatherings. Or, supposing it were known, an attempt to murder a mere beginner in politics, before he had accomplished anything, would be absurd. No one would finesse as deeply as that. It must be a case of mistaken identity, or more likely a practical joke. Having logically reasoned it out, he turned over to go to sleep; but the recollection of his adversary’s tense muscles came again, forcing in upon him the feeling that it was only his own strong grip upon the netting and around the neck of his assailant which had saved his life. This process was often repeated, and, far into the night, his recurring contentious thoughts nagged him into wakefulness.

The next day, as Robinson had predicted, they were kept below, and only indirectly knew anything of what happened on deck, but learned of several

men with fractured limbs and of one sailor being lost overboard.

Montresor was compelled by the coincidence to think that the latter had probably been his assailant—a conviction resulting in contradictory emotions. If the attack had been malicious, he was frankly glad; if a joke, he was sorry. But, whichever it was, his own life had thereby been saved; for the struggle had forced his vise-like grip upon the netting, thus preventing the waves from sweeping him over. Therefore, should he not show gratitude and express sorrow?—what! for one who might have tried to murder him?

Such a paradoxical situation, it can easily be seen, would give ample cause for metaphysical hesitation to any perfectly balanced, unprejudiced mind.



## CHAPTER II

### SHIPMATES

FOR two days the storm raged.

Montresor and Bridgmond were much together during this probationary period, playing picquet, smoking and conversing upon a variety of topics from politics to sport. The Englishman frequently sought to learn in advance something of society in the principal American cities.

"Do you know anything about Boston and Washington?" he asked upon one occasion.

"Not much about Boston," replied Bridgmond, "although I have seen a good many Bostonians away from their city, which, I believe, is a very different thing from the Bostonian on his native pavement. My impression is that to be anybody there you must either write or own a cotton-mill—spin a yarn of one sort or another. Society itself, I fancy, is the same as in any other big city. Boston girls may wear blue stockings, but they carefully select the shade, and now and then the clocking is so gay as to be immoral."

"How about Washington?" persisted Montresor.

"On that I am better posted. Washington cannot be, for a long time to come, the social center London is to you. But every one in Boston, New York or Philadelphia likes to go there for a while to enjoy

society pure and simple. Washingtonians, especially the women, give themselves up to it with a single-hearted devotion which you never see elsewhere. The permanent basis is formed by old families who have lived there for several generations, principally Marylanders, Virginians and retired officers. The next most distinctive element is the Diplomatic Corps, or the "Dips," as we call them. They happen to be a very nice lot just now, but the quality is apt to be kaleidoscopic and generally not equal to that in capitals of other great nations. You see, we are a republic with no court, and, besides, as we don't send ambassadors, none are sent to us, so we don't get the cream, either in men or costumes. But there's no use in my trying to play guide-book. I'll introduce you to a lady from Washington who is on board with her brother, a Member of Congress, and she can tell you more about it now, or show you more of it when you are there, than any one I know. She has probably been ill, as I haven't seen her since the storm commenced; but when it stops, if it ever does, I'll present you—or, if we take to the life-rafts, you may be on the same one, and can introduce yourself as a friend of mine."

Their conversation here took an abrupt turn to the value of life-saving craft and the progress in that branch of maritime contrivances.

On the third day the wind ceased as if by magic, and they glided over a smooth sea under the warm rays of a sun belonging to August rather than to October. Every one was out, many faces being new to Montresor.

In walking along the deck he glanced at a lady sitting in a steamer chair, with her head resting

somewhat languidly against the back of it. She was a trifle pale, but the exquisite tint of a transparent skin declared the pallor only temporary, and that soon her cheeks would glow with health's rich hues. Her features were regular, with eyebrows strongly marked, yet delicate, and her hair of a lustrous brown, clustered in short, wavy curls on forehead and neck. These details Montresor realized afterward, for he did not see them distinctly at the time, being fascinated by the peculiar beauty of her eyes, which it is impossible to describe in cold and exacting print. If we say that he saw the mingled rays of a diamond and sapphire through an opalescent veil, perhaps some conception of what they were will be conveyed. In her face was a radiating sympathy, which made Montresor most illogically pleased with himself.

She was speaking to a woman beside her, and only glanced up as he passed; but in that glance, although transient—even thoughtless—he recognized something of greeting, which, vague at the time, later grew more definite and certain as he looked back upon it. For, pictured in his faithful memory, he was able to gaze deep into her eyes some time after, going beyond the range of physical vision.

Bridgmond, who had slept late, only turned out for luncheon, but, remembering his promise, told Montresor he was ready at any time to introduce him to the lady of whom he had spoken. The Englishman thanked him, but determined to evade that pleasure for the moment and secure a position near the beautiful stranger. He had a blind confidence that fate would bring them together. That mythological person, aided by a mercenary deck steward and a shift

of the wind, made the first move in this plot by placing their chairs not more than a couple of yards apart.

When he first reached the deck she was sitting with her head thrown back and her eyes closed, either in sleep or—soothed by the gentle swing of the vessel and persuasive southern breezes—yielding herself to that delicious waking torpor in which sweet dreams, softly bidden, drift slowly in.

After a while she roused herself and commenced chatting with a friend next to her. Montresor enjoyed watching the play of her features, which almost told him what she was saying. Presently the two Thompson girls, who had been walking up and down, managed to catch her eye and stopped to speak. He saw at once that she was a woman of social prestige, and of great tact, besides. Her manner with the Thompsons was charming, and she conversed with them easily and freely; they were at the same time gently yet effectively kept at a distance. Occasionally, in the familiarity of their remarks, they surged toward her as intimate acquaintances; but when she replied, although there was nothing of coldness or haughtiness, they somehow seemed to find themselves exactly where they were before.

When Bridgmond, after spending the early afternoon playing whist, came on deck he at once joined the lady who had caught Montresor's fancy, and the latter divined that, by foolishly eluding the offered introduction, he had deprived himself of whole hours and miles of happiness.

After his acquaintance with Mrs. Rae had been sanctioned by a formality seeming totally inade-

quate to the importance of the event, they discussed topics already worn threadbare—the storm, the run, longitude, the best position on a ship, etc. She said nothing exceptionally clever or original, yet Montresor could have talked on indefinitely and found such themes inspiring. There was a peculiar charm in the luminous gaze and in her exquisitely mobile mouth which prevented even commonplaces from seeming such.

Montresor was not really a susceptible man in the usual sense. He devoted some time to women; but it was either because his position demanded it, from courtesy, or else frankly to amuse himself. It would not have occurred to him, nor perhaps to his friends, that he could possibly be the victim of a *grande passion*. Neither did he now recognize danger in this sudden fancy; but there was cause for alarm, had he but known it, in that peculiar content which he found from the first in Mrs. Rae's society. If called upon to give a reason for this, he would probably have said it was because of her extreme naturalness.

There was never, either in her manner or speech, the slightest suggestion of affectation. While you could not but feel she was accustomed to being sought after, she never had the appearance of measuring others as to their right to her acquaintance. Yet she was very keen in her judgment of men and women. If she attacked the faults of others, it was without concealed purpose, and in a candid manner that differed little whether they were present or absent. She liked or disliked a person for what they really were, not for what others had agreed to consider them. At the outset Montresor felt that it made no difference to her whether he was the son of an earl or of

a commoner; all she saw in him was an English gentleman introduced by a friend. On that very afternoon he was enabled to compare her straightforward simplicity with the ridiculous affectation of some other Americans.

The Thompson family were seated near them—perhaps by virtue of a tip—and Montresor's counterfeited was talking to the elder daughter. They had all kept to their cabins during the storm.

He informed her his bath had been drawn at eight o'clock and was sixty degrees. She responded with the time and temperature of her own. After a pause he remarked what a beastly shame it was they couldn't have the *Post* every morning to see what their friends had been doing, and she fancied that when she saw *Truth* again she wouldn't know it.

While continuing this conversation, in the same vein, they became more and more swollen in manner and, as seemed to Mrs. Rae and Montresor, when by chance they overheard, more and more stupid in matter.

Presently they noticed a sudden change; there was a nervous twitch in the muscles of the man's face, and his eyes, which for a moment blazed into something resembling expression, sank again into a pitiful vacancy. His voice lost its broad English accent and his language floundered into Americanisms—commonplaces as before, but American commonplaces. Had the weather been rough, they might have thought he was stricken with the first terror of seasickness; now they knew it was something else, and followed his furtive gaze.

A man came forward, pale, unshaven, and cross, as he had a right to be, having spent two days in his

berth—days of fasting and imprecation. As they saw him the Misses Thompson exclaimed:

"Oh, there's Mr. Bell from Baltimore!"

Their companion looked as if he would like to run, but had not the power. Mr. Bell shook hands with the Thompsons, saying, rather drily, he had not happened to see them before. Then, noticing the flaxen-haired man, he chopped off, in a still drier, curter voice:

"Well, Morrison, through with your holiday?"

The man gasped inaudibly, rising at the same time, when, without apology, Bell took his chair, telling him to find another.

The poor fellow, after fumbling feebly with a camp-stool near at hand, paralyzed by the obliviousness which oozed from the Thompsons, murmured:

"I guess it's nearly supper-time, and I'll go downstairs."

In his retreat he was met by young Thompson, who greeted him with great cordiality, afterward joining his family. He nodded to Bell and, apropos of nothing, said, as he waved his hand toward Morrison, disappearing down the companionway:

"That Montresor is quite a decent sort of fellow."

"What Montresor?" asked Bell, curtly.

"Why, the Honorable Arthur Montresor, son of the Earl of Broadlands, the man I just spoke to."

"That," said Bell, in a rasping voice of scorn, "is Billy Morrison, one of my junior clerks." Then, turning to the others: "Has he been playing off the son of an earl on you?"

There was a moment of silence; then Mrs. Thompson, in her most dignified manner, said:

"Hardly that, I fancy; but some one, I think, men-

tioned to us that he was, having probably made a mistake. I had not noticed the young man before, but I believe he gave some assistance to my daughter during the storm, and when he joined us to-day we, of course, were civil to him."

Then the expression of all seemed to say: "We do not understand, Mr. Bell, how you could suspect us of speaking to one of your clerks, except in a spirit of benevolence."

Bell gave a succession of chopped-off laughs:

"The Honorable—Arthur—Montresor!"

An acquaintance, overhearing him, approached and said, in a low voice:

"That is Mr. Montresor sitting with Mrs. Rae."

Montresor, with an amused smile, felt himself the object of ten Thompsonian eyes. One Miss Thompson grew pale, the other red; Mrs. Thompson bit her lip, but was calm; Mr. Thompson knit his brows; the Thompson cub stared stupidly.

Then the group hastily resumed conversation, upon a different topic, however. Montresor said:

"Why is it that when Americans try to imitate us they make such fools of themselves?"

"Because we are observing, I suppose," replied Mrs. Rae, with a mischievous smile.

"That's a fair hit," laughed the Englishman; "but I hope the reason you read so many of our books is not because they are written by fools."

"Oh, no," was the response, with a critical air; "even Carlyle, in his census of Great Britain, did not say *all* fools, but only 'mostly.'"

"But, really, now," persisted Montresor, "why do your countrymen make themselves so very English? It is flattering to us, especially when we see



them imitate even our vices and follies—you seem to think we have follies—but we assuredly do not like them any the better for it. Half the time it seems as if they were making fun of us. This poor fellow, my double, who has just gone below, managed to deceive his fellow-countrymen, while *I* never could have mistaken him. I often feel like blushing as I think, ‘Do we really appear such stupid dullards to Americans?’ We are not a loquacious or a demonstrative race; but the utter inanity which some Americans seem to think British is quite as untrue as the Frenchman’s notion that we say nothing but ‘*Rosbifgotam.*’ ”

“Aren’t you generalizing too much?” responded Mrs. Rae. “There is a ridiculous aping of the English on the part of some of our countrymen, and on the part of a great many more there is a sincere and admiring—what shall I call it?—assimilation. Or, as yours is our mother-country, perhaps it is a ‘throwback.’ But you really do make better saddles, carriages and boots, and speak better English—I suppose for the reason that what you speak *is* English. I can say all this with great fairness, because I don’t try to be a bit English. It is impossible; I suppose I am too old to learn, and, besides, I have something of the French temperament. I think you will find that our fondness for English sports is not a bit affected.”

“Then I may infer,” asked Montresor, “that some of the imitation is sincere flattery?”

“And a large part,” responded Mrs. Rae, “merely the desire to show that we have traveled—as when we adopt Russian samovars, French poodles, Genoese veils or Turkish cigarettes. I believe if we went

much to the 'Cannibal Isles' we would return with a taste for roast enemy instead of great, burned English chops."

"You prefer, I suppose," suggested Montresor, a trifle jealously, "the little French ones, with paper pantalettes?"

"No chops at all, with or without those garments," she answered, decidedly. "They do not tempt me. I like to be led on by saucy entrées—now I know you will despise me!"

Truly in another woman Montresor would have thought such a taste indicated feebleness; but in Mrs. Rae it only showed daintiness. He assured her of this with eager earnestness. Both realized that for a short acquaintance they had become rather intimate—Mrs. Rae apparently thought too much so, whereupon she tried to make their conversation more conventional; but after brief successes there were other relapses. Indeed, at times, with something like dismay, she would check remarks that seemed to verge upon the confidential.

Bridgmond's two casual references to Mrs. Rae had never included her name, nor did he mention it until in the act of taking Montresor up to her for introduction. The latter at first supposed her husband was alive; but the absence of all allusion to such a person soon caused doubts, which were strengthened by learning that for some years she had been living with her brother in Washington. It seemed incredible, however, that she should be a widow. At a little distance, something in her poise, and in the subtle deference paid her by every one, gave the impression of a woman not less than twenty-five; near at hand, looking upon her abso-

lutely transparent complexion, hearing her rippling laughter, and, above all, being in the thrall of that ineffable naturalness, Montresor could not think her more than twenty. In that case it was hard to believe she had already married, buried a husband and burst forth into colors and unwilted gayety, unless she was fundamentally unfeeling—or had not cared for him. Either of these hypotheses was repugnant, the latter involving in itself a dilemma which still further perplexed Montresor. Would he wish her capable of having given herself to a loveless marriage? Or did he prefer the other alternative, that some man, against whom there was no statute of mortmain, should reach his shadowy hand from out the grave and retain a hold upon her heart? Similar perplexities greeted him if the husband were still living, but separated or divorced from her. If it were the man's fault, then she would have put him away only as a sacrifice to her dignity and honor. How little such actions can annihilate a woman's affection Montresor well knew. On the other hand, was it conceivable that she could have been the one whose love was beguiled from where her vows had placed it? In such a supposition there was involved an ethereal, but revolting and fatal, anachronism.

The mere fact that a man of the world, as he dressed himself for dinner (with unusual care), should occupy himself with such thoughts about a woman whom he had known only a couple of hours was significant. Still more was his inclination toward stealthiness in broaching the absorbing topic to Bridgmond. He waited until they were settled at picquet, and, having absent-mindedly neglected to "sink" a card in his declaration, said, nonchalantly:

"Oh—er—your friend, Mrs. Rae, is quite pleasant."

"I *thought*," said Bridgmond, who was not simple, "you seemed quite chummy after the first two or three hours."

"No one else joined us, you see," Montresor explained, apologetically.

"Who'd be such a fool?" was the laconic response.

They finished that game, and, as he was slowly shuffling the cards, Montresor asked:

"Did you say Mr. Rae was on board?"

"I hope not," said Bridgmond, with a simulated shudder, ignored by Montresor with pretended obtuseness.

"Where is he?" was his persistent question.

"I don't know exactly," replied the other; "but, from a notice in the papers years ago, I judge it is not polite to mention his present residence."

"Bad sort, was he?" Montresor inquired.

"One of the worst."

"What do you consider one of the worst?" Montresor ventured, hoping to elicit concrete facts by an abstract question.

"He does bad by stealth," was the answer, "and his family blush to find it fame. John Rae, when he married, was thought a model young man. All of Katherine Singleton's family and friends urged the match. She had lots of men in love with her; but didn't seem to know what love was, except for her family. The upshot of it was that the other 'same old story' was told again, which is just as old as the 'five o'clock in the morning' one. When Rae showed down, everybody who had a hand in it felt awfully cut up about it."

"What did he do?" Montresor asked, without trying to hide his interest.

"Oh, everything—money, drink, women; but, worst of all, he was such a brute to her—didn't strike her, but nagged her about money and every little thing. He got with a bad crowd of foreigners, and off somewhere in Europe they gave him the typhus. He died, thank the Lord, about a year after he married."

"How long ago was that?" Montresor asked.

"Five years—and Mrs. Rae is twenty-five," said Bridgmond, answering both verbal and mental questions.

The only other information imparted, which may be noted here, was that after the death of her parents Mrs. Rae had lived with her brother, and that she had been asked to marry again a dozen times, but to no purpose.

"Is that history or an autobiography?" Montresor asked.

"I? Oh, no," responded Bridgmond. "I lost all my nerve in a steamboat explosion when a boy."

## CHAPTER III

### THE IRISH QUESTION AND ONE OF A PERSONAL NATURE

DURING the days which followed, Montresor saw much of Mrs. Rae, and though, as may be inferred, quite ready to find her attractive, and starting at a high level of expectation, it must be admitted she bore the scrutiny extremely well.

Even on a slight acquaintance one became aware of the essential womanliness which constituted her greatest charm. While her character had that frou-frou which is inevitable with gay vivacity or fashion, there was nothing tawdry about it—it was as graceful and refined as some exquisite lace.

They did not always chaff as in the beginning, but discussed books, philosophy or politics—for Mrs. Rae, like most Washington women, took an interest in the political questions of her country and in those of foreign nations, her brother being a member of the Committee on Foreign Relations in the House of Representatives.

Montresor found she had a good mind and really understood what she discussed, never embarrassing the subject with an effort to be always original or score a point. Her clever speeches were so spontaneous and unemphasized that they seemed to grow out of the conversation, leaving a doubt in the mind

of her interlocutor as to who had originated the germinal ideas.

Montresor had eluded a disposition shown by the Thompson family toward his acquaintance, not from resentment, but because they seemed uninteresting, and more especially for the reason that any enlargement of acquaintance might interfere with opportunities of seeing Mrs. Rae. The latter found it rather embarrassing to humor him in this avoidance. Finally, when obliged to introduce him to Miss Thompson, who came up asking interminable questions, she said, as soon as they were alone:

"You must not think the Thompsons are really as bad—I mean socially—as they have seemed to you. In New York, where you are likely to meet them, they behave quite differently, for they have attained their position and know who's who. Had they known from the first that you were Lord Broadlands' son, they would have given you a different impression."

"That's just it," said Montresor. "They wouldn't have been polite to me, but to three little names in fine print in Burke's peerage—Arthur Reginald Montresor."

"Not at all; those three names, if you like, would enable them to know you were you. But they would, in the end, have appreciated the qualities that are supposed to go with those little names and been nice for the sake of the man."

"But I don't need such entertainment," replied Montresor. "After all, character does go for something, even in ordinary associates."

"Haven't I told you, though," she retorted, "you have an exaggerated notion of the silliness of the

Thompson character—at least, a different one from what you would have had meeting them ashore?”

“I have always heard,” Montresor suggested, “that a sea voyage brings out character.”

“Yes,” laughed Mrs. Rae, “and they say the same of too much wine. I wonder if it is because they are both unsteady? Isn’t it going too deeply into things to consider the real character of the Thompsons? Is it sensible to take what they are seven days out of the year instead of the other three hundred and—something?”

“Don’t you allow,” asked Montresor, “any days for tipsiness?”

“No; except, perhaps, for the Thompson boy. I know the women don’t drink too much—it is not yet the vogue—and Mr. Thompson boasts of never having tasted anything intoxicating in his life.”

“I always suspect,” said Montresor, “that sort of a man.”

“I see,” responded Mrs. Rae, “you are determined not to be pleased.” Then she added, with a sudden change to gravity: “Frankly, neither do I trust him. I don’t know why, but he gives me the impression of one who would do anything to gain his ends. Not that I have heard anything against him, except that he was of humble origin somewhere out West; but we hear the same of so many who have succeeded that if we tried to find out about it we should have no other employment. Of course, if we expect to make friends of them, it is worth while; but in life’s hurry-scurry one hasn’t time to make friends who have to be investigated, so we won’t analyze the Thompsons.

“What a blessed thing this life on shipboard is!



Not because it shows character, but because it simplifies our lives—gives us time to think, and talk to our friends, without the furtive apprehension about our next duty. Hasn't some one said we can make ourselves rich, not by increasing our income, but by reducing our desires? So on shipboard we all suddenly become millionaires."

"If," said Montresor, "by that you mean we desire fewer things, it is true; but those few things we want just as much as the many things ashore—sometimes more."

"Isn't it," asked Mrs. Rae, "easier to get those few things than the many?"

"Oh, no," responded Montresor, warmly. "I wish it were—especially on this voyage."

Mrs. Rae seemed to detect a dangerous trend to the conversation, and, in her lightest, most bantering tone, said, as she rose:

"You poor man! I hadn't realized the luncheon gong had sounded so long ago."

The next afternoon, which, in all probability, was to be the last one of their voyage, Montresor inwardly resolved to spend entirely with Mrs. Rae. For he knew that, although he would shortly go to Washington, he could not there have the same freedom of intercourse as that which existed on shipboard.

As is frequently the case, man proposes and the devil seems to have the disposition of things. They had scarcely been seated a dozen minutes before acquaintances gathered around with the usual remarks about the end of the voyage, its pleasures and discomforts, and the chances of their meeting again.

"I suppose," said one of them, "we should con-

gratulate ourselves we have not been blown up by dynamite."

"No danger of that on an outward voyage," said an Englishman; "there are too many bog-trotters on board. The Government should insist upon an Irish Member of Parliament sailing on every steamer."

"That," replied the first speaker, "would have no effect if the noble commander of the Fenians ordered the said Member to sacrifice himself for the good of the cause."

"Indeed, he would not do it," retorted the other. "Like the American Artemus Ward, these Irish will 'sacrifice their wives' relations to the third and fourth degree'; they will feed cows on potatoes filled with needles, mutilate dumb beasts generally, and shoot women and children in the dark; but, as to spilling their own precious blood, they only do it on paper."

"It is a curious thing," said Mrs. Rae's brother, whose name was Singleton, "that the Irish, who have been, in every age, famous for their valor, and are still the fighting-cocks of the British army, should make this cowardly war of boycott, mutilation and secret assassination."

At this point Robinson joined the group, with a few words of rather over-polite greeting to Mrs. Rae—a manner noticeable in his intercourse with her. She replied with her habitual courtesy; but there was no encouragement in it. His eyes met those of Montresor, and there suddenly passed between them a look of distrust and dislike, which may have existed before without coming to the surface.

The conversation meantime continued on the general right and wrong of the Irish question, upon which Mrs. Rae remarked:

"I never can quite make up my mind as to what I think about it; like all women, my feelings rule my judgment. When I read of their putting needles into potatoes, I think all tenants should be evicted. Then when I see, in pictorial papers, some old man driven out of his home, leading a little child by the hand, I think dynamite is too good for the landlords."

"Thank you," interpolated Montresor, laughing.

"You see," explained Singleton, "my sister didn't know any of your father's estates were in Ireland. That's one disadvantage of absenteeism. I think the English treatment of the Irish question has been almost as capricious as my sister's mind. At one time some sentimentalist holds sway and, because of the innocent ones' wrongs, lets the guilty go unpunished. Then some indignant disciplinarian takes his place, who feels that for a certain amount of crime there must be an equal amount of punishment, and isn't particular as to who gets it."

"That's just it," said Robinson. "The whole trouble is, they won't let the Irish govern themselves. Why don't they let them have a Parliament, as they had in the last century? But they took it away at the very time when parliamentary government advanced to the principle of ministerial responsibility, and hence greater usefulness."

"Perhaps," replied Montresor, "it was on that account they did so. When the King represented so much power as he did in the time of George III

there was no harm in England's allowing an Irish Parliament; but when Parliament grew in power until it became virtually king itself, you can see it would be impossible to have *two* kings, one in London and the other in Dublin."

"Why impossible?" retorted Robinson. "The colonies have their Parliaments. What is the difference between Ireland and Canada?"

"About three thousand miles," suggested Bridgmond.

"Precisely," continued Singleton, more seriously. "Ireland is too near for the English to allow a separate political growth. She is too near to neglect her enmity—and too far to gain her friendship. The Irish Channel is responsible for most of Ireland's troubles. If she could be towed alongside of England there would be as thorough an amalgamation as with the Scotch or Welsh. Even more, for the Irish, with their warm-hearted, quick, responsive natures, would soon so mingle in sympathy and habits with the English that it would be difficult to draw the line between the two countries. England should promote intercourse in every way—make free ferries, induce Englishmen to go to Ireland and Irishmen to England, start co-operative farms and manufacturing, and abolish the usurious 'gombeen man.' When savings banks and full stomachs had made their appearance the political and religious feeling would grow less bitter. Give a man plenty to eat, and he is not only less likely to be a villain, but is also less apt to think his neighbor one. So, after uniting England and Ireland by a steam bridge, I should follow Mr. Dick's advice, when Aunt Betsy Trotwood asked what she should do with David

Copperfield, on his first appearance: 'Wash him and give him something to eat.'"

"We'd better do that for ourselves," said Bridgmond. "Five bells have sounded, and we shall soon have the opportunity."

But he could not thus stop the discussion, which proceeded in a spluttering, anecdotal fashion for quite a while.

Robinson addressed most of his later remarks to Montresor, and without any appearance of that dislike which for a moment had flashed from his eye. He spoke not in an argumentative or disagreeable way, but rather as wishing the opinion of one whom he thought better posted than himself upon an intricate subject. Nevertheless, Montresor became conscious of a feeling of irritation toward the Irish such as he had never experienced before, and this condition of mind was also directed toward Robinson, although he had not been the only champion of Ireland. The capacity of looking with equal eye upon both aspects of the case still existed; but now there was with it a sting of impatience quite new in Montresor.

As is frequently the case when one longs vaguely, Montresor found, when an opportunity came to be alone with Mrs. Rae, that he was at a loss for something to say. Upon such short acquaintance, to put into words any of the nebulous wishes floating through his mind would, he realized, make him seem a conceited fool or an impulsive scatter-brain. So most of the time the conversation ran upon entirely different topics from those he had fancied during the afternoon.

"I didn't know," said Mrs. Rae, at one time, "that

your father was an Irish landlord, or I should have tried to express myself more moderately about eviction. But do you really see such scenes as I spoke of? I don't mean on your father's land, but others'."

"I am ashamed to say," replied Montresor, "that I have not been in Ireland since I was quite a lad. In fact, none of our family ever do, except now and then, every three or four years, my father goes, for a week at the outside."

Montresor could see in the moonlight that Mrs. Rae's face grew a trifle grave.

"How can you stay away?" she asked him. "Don't you want to know how your own tenants are treated, even if you don't care about the right and wrong of the general question?"

"My father," was the reply, "has a steward in whom he has absolute confidence. His family has been with us for generations. They are all good Scotch Presbyterians, and as honest as the day is long."

"No doubt honest," retorted Mrs. Rae; "but are your father's tenants also Scotch Presbyterians?"

Montresor felt foolish at such an obvious hit, frankly admitting:

"No; they are Catholics. Perhaps he may not be as sympathetic as he ought, although I know he has strict orders not to interfere in any way with their religion."

"Don't think me presuming," said Mrs. Rae, with earnestness, "but I feel we should never leave to others—no matter how angelic—the care of those who are dependent upon us. Even suppose that everything is done that you would wish, it is not the same thing. There is a saying: 'He gives twice

who gives quickly.' I think he gives *thrice* who gives in person. Do you mind my saying this?"

"No, indeed!" Montresor answered, with even greater feeling than she had shown. "I appreciate deeply your saying it, and promise you I will act upon it. To be candid, I have thought very badly of friends who are Irishmen and who stayed away all the time from Ireland. But I never applied it to ourselves, because we are English, you know—at least, the Irish blood that brought us the estate is very far back. I suppose we all see the mote in our brother's eye."

"Is that a hit at me?" asked Mrs. Rae. "Because, if so, I don't think I deserve it." Notwithstanding Montresor's protestation, she proceeded: "In the first place, I have no tenants, except one old woman, who, having been my nurse, you may imagine I am not very hard upon. But I honestly do try to practice what I preach in any help I may give to others. My friends in Washington, I fear, think I am not very charitable, because I don't join their societies; but I believe that, with little trouble, every one in a big city can find for themselves worthy objects for all they are willing to spend."

She was so unaffected in saying this that Montresor saw she really believed it possible he might think her ready to criticise others more severely than herself, and it added to the warmth of his regard for her.

They continued talking about themselves with a freedom not shown before, feeling that in the few hours remaining to them they could not waste their time discussing railroad schedules, hotels, sights, etc., which would have seemed too inharmonious as,

in the clear moonlight, they walked along the deck, almost alone. The usual charity concert was going on below, and, having given their donations to friends, they felt free to enjoy the music as it floated out over the calm sea. There was just enough motion to make it necessary—or allowable—that she should take his arm, and occasionally, as some wave a little more impulsive than the others gave an added roll, she would cling to him slightly, or perhaps her form would for a brief moment touch his, sending thrills not quite so transient. Impelled by her beauty and charm, impetuous words sought utterance, only to be restrained by a deference never before so completely dominating his habitually easy, indulgent courtesy toward women. Yet the restraint was neither harsh nor forbidding; it was as if Katherine's own inner spirit had placed a tenderly gentle touch upon his lips, while, with a wistful sigh, it whispered in his ear, "Not yet."

Love, which is constantly hovering around, will, nevertheless, always gain some recognition. Its opportunity came in a discussion of Shiela, the Princess of Thule. If, at first, Mrs. Rae showed a nervous bravado in speaking upon such a topic, this disappeared, and eventually, although serious, she was so purely intellectual and impersonal in her comment upon the passion, that Montresor, stopping as they were making a turn, said:

"Have you ever been in love?" He meant to say it banteringly, but there must have been unwitting seriousness in his voice.

"That is a strange question to ask me, Mr. Montresor," she replied, with an indescribable mixture of frankness and reluctant reproach. "It is a strange



question for any one to ask a woman who has been married. Are we not good enough friends for me to say you have not asked it?"

In speaking, she resumed their arrested promenade. He was silent for a moment, thinking how best he could excuse himself without telling the whole truth, which would be worse than his previous speech. Then he said:

"I cannot tell you how I thank you for appreciating, notwithstanding appearances, that I didn't mean to be impertinent."

She answered, with a gayety somewhat forced:

"You see, I am not very good at self-analysis, and object to being cross-questioned," and immediately resumed the discussion of yachting in the Mediterranean, from which point their conversation had voyaged to the Hebrides, and brought Shiela and Love on deck. This time they remained in the more southerly and paradoxically chilling waters; but even there not long, for they had not taken more than a couple of turns when Mrs. Rae said:

"Now, I think I must go down and attend to my packing, so as to be free to-morrow morning when we are going into the harbor."

As she bade him good-night her manner was thoroughly friendly, and yet, when afterward he searched his memory for definite encouragement, it seemed ever elusive.

## CHAPTER IV

### A MASS-MEETING AND A HOSPITAL

As they slowly steamed up the harbor Montresor was impressed with the lack of novelty in the New World. The old-fashioned barbette guns and the grass growing upon the casemates of the fort they passed were just the same as those one might see in Europe on some useless defense of a boundary no longer needing martial demarcation. Beyond, in the city itself, he saw tall spires looking as if built in times when men gave their best work to edifices of religion, and not when materialism had invaded every class and was babbled by infants at the public schools. For it must be remembered that at the period of which I speak those monstrous buildings now towering like a vast and ugly wall had not obscured all the beauties given by a former age to the lower end of New York.

To the left Bridgmond pointed out Bedloe's Island, where it was intended to place a colossal statue of "Liberty Enlightening the World," then being constructed in France by Bartholdi, to be presented to New York by citizens of that country.

"You can see opposite Delmonico's restaurant," said he, "the first section of the figure, placed there temporarily—a hand bearing a torch; rather characteristic—a torch is the French idea of liberty."

"I suppose," suggested Montresor, "Americans would have put a tea-chest in its place."

"Oh, no," responded Bridgmond, "we would have put a fair copy of the Magna Charta, of which the tea-chest was a lineal descendant, and, in place of the torch, the axe which struck off Charles the First's head; but then, you see, we didn't choose what should represent Liberty. We have it in such abundance and variety, it would really embarrass us to select a crest for it."

"Much of it," Montresor retorted, "is made for you by Irish statesmen who are imported from Great Britain—I say, Bridgmond, has it occurred to you that the only thing you haven't got a tariff on is statesmen."

"Best argument I know of against free trade," the other gruntingly admitted. "But if you wish to see Liberty in its forcing-bed, I will take you tomorrow to see a great open-air mass-meeting, if you'd care to."

Montresor eagerly assented, and they discussed American politics until Mrs. Rae came on deck, when, the Englishman's interest in the Tammany tangle faltering, his tactful friend left him free to join her.

"This is really the end, isn't it?" said she. Was there a touch of regret in her voice?

"The end of the *voyage*," Montresor quickly added. "Do you know, your rather cynical remark that it is better not to accept the true character as shown on shipboard for seven days, but the superficial one for the other three hundred and fifty-eight as shown ashore, makes me almost hope I have made a bad impression upon—people."

"But you must remember," she answered, "I said it of those whom I did not think you meant to make your *friends*. If you do not wish to make friends of—people, why, of course, you must try to make as bad an impression as possible—perhaps you have."

The smile with which this was said went far toward reassuring him, after his unlucky blunder of the previous evening.

He was able to remain at her side for some time as the steamer was being slowly warped, against the swift tide, into the slip alongside of the pier.

Many friends of the passengers, who had been advised, by telegrams posted about the city, of the steamer's arrival, were on the wharf, exchanging greetings, according to their temperament and social condition; those in the lower ranks of life having decidedly the advantage, as they did not hesitate to yell details of domestic news and expressions of affection, which the others reserved for a more fitting occasion.

Montresor said good-bye to Mrs. Rae, and, as he looked into those clear, frank eyes and felt the cordial, but not too demonstrative, grasp of her hand, he knew that he was parting with a friend, and perhaps——?

That evening, after dinner, at his comfortable little hotel—now out of vogue—he found there were letters for him. Opening one in a lady's handwriting—sealed, defiant of heraldry, with a crest—his astonishment was great to read as follows:

"MY DEAR MR. MONTRESOR:

"You will no doubt be surprised at hearing so soon from me; but, knowing you are much interested

in the political questions of this country, and expecting to have a friend of ours, who is very prominent in political circles, dine with us on Wednesday evening, I thought perhaps you might like to meet him. Should you be able to do so, it would give us much pleasure to have you come on that day at eight o'clock.

"Yours cordially,

"HARRIET B. THOMPSON."

Although justly estimating this precipitate courtesy, he determined to take Mrs. Rae's advice and not analyze motives too exactly. He therefore accepted—the bait of the politician he was to meet consoling him for an otherwise uninteresting prospect.

The next day Bridgmond called and took him to the Knickerbocker Club, where they dined, and afterward to his rooms, on Fifth Avenue, to view the torchlight procession which preceded the mass-meeting.

As they reached a balcony the end of the street suddenly burst into light, and then a great, fiery river came pouring along, with a spray of Roman candles and skyrockets darting high into the air, while the confused roar of a multitude, mingling with a brazen blare of music, drowned their hearing. After watching awhile, they descended, and, giving themselves to this torrent, they soon arrived in an open square, where, from improvised stands lit by flaring torches, orators declaimed in English—not of the purest—German, French, and Italian to an eddying throng. While they were listening to one of these "spellbinders"—coatless for effect, and with

a concealed sweater for comfort—rant against the American Minister to London for “hob-nobbing” (*i. e.*, dining) with royalty, Montresor, from the corner of his eye, became conscious of being scrutinized by a man standing near. His clothing was rather that of the lower class; but the face showed a calm, intelligent culture not often found in that rank of life. Beside him was another man, in a rough ulster of fashionable cut; and, while Montresor could not see his face, there was something vaguely reminiscent in the figure. The two seemed to converse most of the time, paying little heed to the oration. Montresor concluded that any attention given to himself by the man first mentioned had been accidental, and thought no more about it.

Presently an allusion made by the speaker to the secession of certain members from the club for which he was speaking seemed to sow dragons’ teeth broadcast, and warriors fierce, if not armed, sprang into existence on every side. Some of the streets near by had been undergoing repairs, and soon fragments of stone filled the air. Not having enough interest in the question to shed their blood, Bridgmond and Montresor disentangled themselves from the crowd as soon as they could and walked off toward the University Club. They had not gone far before they overtook the man Montresor had before noticed. He walked with straggling gait, as if confused, holding one hand up to his head. As they came near he sat down on a doorstep, apparently to rest, and they stopped to ask if he had been hurt, getting the answer that he had been struck by a stone and felt faint.

"Can't we do something for you until your friends come?" asked Montresor.

The man looked up in a bewildered but earnest way, and there seemed a struggle in his mind as to what he should say. At the end his eye, at first gentle and grateful, grew misty and gloomy, as he said:

"No, sir; I have no friends here, and I'd be glad if you'd tell me what I can do."

Montresor hailed a passing cab, and, putting the man in it, they drove, by the advice of Bridgmond, to Bellevue Hospital. There an official insisted upon certain questions before the patient could be sent to a ward.

"Are you a friend of his'n?" he asked of Bridgmond.

"Well—yes—I want to see he is taken care of."

"What's your name?"

"John A. Bridgmond."

"What's his'n?"

"Thomas MacManus," promptly answered the man for himself.

"What's your address?" he asked of Bridgmond.

"Knickerbocker Club."

"What's his'n?"

Again the man promptly gave the reply, naming a place on Fourth Avenue, and also, in reply, gave the name of his father and mother.

When the patient, after all these answers were slowly and painfully written down, finally started for the ward above, Bridgmond accompanied him, and Montresor remained for a few minutes, intending to say that he would pay for any comforts which were necessary. The officer, not noticing his presence, said to an assistant:

"That fellow's lying, I'll bet a nickel."

"What makes you think so?" asked Montresor.

"Oh, I don't know," was the reply, "what it is, but I've been here so long, and it happens so often, that I can always spot 'em. Do you know anything about him, sir?"

Montresor answered in the negative, saying they had merely been present at the row in which the man was hurt, but wished to do what they could for him.

"Well, sir, I don't know which it is, his name or his address, or maybe both; but he's lying about one of 'em, and no mistake. It ain't nuthin' unusual, and he don't look like a tough, so I guess any kindness you want to show him will be all right."

Montresor learned that, as far as the rules were concerned, everything requisite for comfort was provided by the institution; but it was hinted that if some of the man's friends kept a watch to make sure he was not overlooked, it would be better.

After seeing MacManus comfortably settled they left the hospital, saying they would return.

The next morning they found their patient in a high fever and, at times, rather flighty. In these periods he seemed, judging by fragments of his speech, to be contending about something to be done, and which he did not want to do. No names, that they could distinguish, were mentioned, but he seemed to be arguing with a person who had control over him.

When he became calmer Montresor placed his arm under the patient's neck in order to arrange the pillow. Although intent upon that simple act and nothing else, there shot into his mind one of those indistinct, flashing day-dreams which so frequently come



to us from we know not where; for a brief moment he was on the steamer in that stormy night and again engaged in desperate struggle, the black waters hissing in his ears. The next instant his mind was restored to the task of calculating the exact angle at which to place the pillow.

## CHAPTER V

### A DINNER PARTY

AT five minutes after eight Montresor entered Mr. Thompson's residence, on Fifth Avenue. A footman in the glory of stockinged livery opened the door, and, through a line of similar lackeys, he passed into a spacious hall where stood suits of armor and pieces of statuary. On the chimney-piece, which projected above the fireplace and narrowed to a point at the ceiling, after the manner of those in Italy and the Netherlands, were swords and scabbards of antique fashion, Venetian bow-spears, pistols of old German manufacture, and guns with fanciful inlaid stocks. In fact, there was all that could suggest generations of travelers and collectors.

Up a carved oak stairway of magnificence and beauty, brought from an old castle abroad, he was ushered into the drawing-room, and, being announced in a loud voice, found he was the first comer. Bridgmond arrived soon after, followed by others in rapid succession until there were fully twenty.

The ladies of the house monopolized Montresor, and he noticed an ease in their bearing different from what he would have expected, had he not been cautioned by Mrs. Rae. From time to time his eyes wandered around in search of the politician he was

to meet, but after several failures to identify any one as such he concluded to await developments.

Presently his heart gave a throb, for he saw—or for a moment thought he saw—his lovely companion of the voyage. The resemblance, at first sight undeniable, soon gave way upon more strict scrutiny. The features and coloring of the newcomer were much the same, but an expression of anxious eagerness was so different from that of Mrs. Rae as almost to obliterate the likeness. He learned that she was a Mrs. Morton, “and,” added Miss Thompson, “a cousin of the Mrs. Rae whom you met on the steamer, and resembles her very much, as you see.”

She was assuredly a pretty woman, with a beautiful neck, liberally displayed, and was now laughing loudly with the men gathered around her as she unconcernedly arranged one of the straps which held up her bodice, declining, in a pointed manner significantly amusing, the assistance offered her.

After a delay of much more than the quarter of an hour's grace Mrs. Sympkins-Smythe—a fashionable leader—arrived and was ushered in with éclat. She made no apology to the hostess, but greeted her with that stolid assurance which to some people appears an expression of high breeding. Her pose indicated that she was maintained in her supremacy by constant assertion, proving a good illustration of Bridgmond's saying: “A man is sometimes brusque because he is a swell, and sometimes a swell because he is brusque.”

Simultaneously Mr. Elton was announced, and Montresor, recognizing a name prominent in politics, divined him to be the man he was asked to meet. His appearance was rather commonplace, and his

manner, far from being distinguished, lacked, also, Mrs. Sympkins-Smythe's aggressive vulgarity, being probably mitigated by that polite amiability which, in its ignoble desire to gain favor, makes a fair substitute for the politeness springing from self-respect.

At dinner Mr. Elton sat on one side of the hostess and Montresor on the other. The latter having been assigned to take Mrs. Morton in, she turned to him and said:

"Mr. Montresor, let's skip."

"Do you mean we shall gambol like lambs together, or are you using slang and proposing to leave this feast?"

"No," she said, "I don't mean either; but let's skip the conventional questions of a first meeting. I promise not to ask if it's your first visit to New York, etc., if you'll promise to refrain from asking me if I am a New Yorker or Washingtonian, if I've ever been in England—all that sort of thing."

"I hardly think it right," replied Montresor, "to forbid my learning as much as I can about the charming neighbor so kindly given me. However, I will try to carry out your wishes; but you must give me a lead."

"I don't like to—I shall have an uncomfortable feeling of being chased."

"Such a condition can scarcely be a novelty."

"I don't like your word 'condition'; it reminds me of a prayer-book or catechism. Besides, to make it a compliment, I must know by what kind of men I am pursued."

"By *artists*, certainly."

"Is that a compliment to my beauty or an aspersion upon my morals?"

"English artists have not such depraved tastes."

"I didn't know there were any English artists."

"Are you so down upon the English?"

"Only the nation, not the individuals."

"Is it presuming in me to ask whether you regard me as a nation or as an individual?"

"What a conceited question! Reminds one of Louis Fourteenth's '*L'Etat—c'est moi.*' Are you like him? I am sure you're not. He was a pompous hypocrite; such a deceitful—why haven't they some name for a male prude? I suppose because there are so few specimens it is not worth while to classify them."

"I am glad you can say something so civil of my sex, and myself as well."

Mrs. Morton laughed and said, encouragingly:

"Oh, I suspect you are more like Henri Quatre."

From this they wandered into a discussion of that monarch's many loves. Mrs. Morton was accustomed to comment upon such topics with a freedom which she called French, forgetting there is a felicitous delicacy of suggested explicitness belonging to that facile language, not possible in the more solid English.

Montresor, from the first, followed Mrs. Morton's lead a trifle stiffly, his retorts being concocted in the time afforded by an easy deliberation of mastication, most exasperating to the footman who stood behind him. Distinctly he felt a little awkward; why, I cannot say, unless Mrs. Morton's resemblance to Mrs. Rae troubled him. The former lady did not, however, notice any sluggishness on the Englishman's part other than what she considered charac-

teristic; but, for her own purposes, presently exclaimed:

"But we are shocking each other too much for first acquaintance. Let us choose a more conventional theme—my cousin, Mrs. Rae, for instance, who says she met you on the steamer."

"Indeed," retorted Montresor, with animation, "I thought her one of the most charming and natural women I ever met."

"Yes; but it is natural for her to be conventional," retorted Mrs. Morton, with patronizing tone.

There was enough truth in this to make Montresor uncomfortable, and he said:

"I see a prophet is not without honor save in her own family."

"You don't approve of me," Mrs. Morton pleaded, "because I am criticising Kate behind her back; but I can't do it to her face; I have no time—she uses it all up lecturing *me*."

"Are you so very wicked?" he asked, banteringly, restored to good humor.

Mrs. Morton laughed, and answered:

"Not really. But Kate may think that being unconventional is wicked, without thinking that to be wicked is unconventional. She's a dear, all the same." Then she went on in that manner peculiarly feline—or feminine—by which, in praising Mrs. Rae's least attractive points, she managed to give a sly scratch with each caress.

Presently Montresor turned the conversation by asking Mrs. Morton with what leading principles or policies Mr. Elton was specially identified. This was a poser for her, as not only was she unable to explain any deep subject coherently, but also it would

have been difficult for the most astute analyst in any journal or review to have answered such a question. It was doubtful if Mr. Elton himself *could* do so, and it was beyond dispute that he *would* not. She hesitated a little, and then replied she did not know much about politics, adding, with what she conceived to be an inspiration:

"He's a man of a great deal of influence; he's very entertaining, and—always knows people's names."

The table was wide, and Mr. Elton had been conversing with Mrs. Thompson, so that there was no difficulty in discussing him without impropriety; but at this point a sudden calm obliged them to desist. When the conversation was resumed it became general by the hostess telling Montresor that she had been describing to Mr. Elton their stormy voyage. The former at once joined in and told of his enjoyment and how it had been explained to him by a man named Robinson, crossing with them.

"Who, by the way," he said, "seems to be a sort of universal genius, as he not only described quite learnedly the theory of cyclones, but discussed with equal facility finance, racing and politics—the only subject omitted, I believe, being that of love."

When he reached the word "politics" there appeared in Mr. Elton's eye that dead-fish dullness which Dickens calls "filmy," arising, in certain temperaments, from suppressed emotion. At the same time Montresor was conscious of his knee being smartly pushed by that of Mrs. Morton, the two signals ending his discussion of Mr. Robinson.

When he next turned to her, Montresor did so with more ardor than he had shown before, the familiarity with which she had favored him giving

a more personal aspect to her liveliness. Not yet was he free from the habit of his caste to seek amusement.

"I must beg your pardon," said Mrs. Morton, "for being so forcible, but I thought perhaps you did not know that Mr. Robinson is supposed to be devoted to Mrs. Sympkins-Smythe."

After the departure of the ladies the conversation near Mr. Elton soon turned to politics; but that gentleman's discourse upon the chances of getting the Irish and German vote was so purely technical as to give Montresor a bewildered impression that there was, in principle, no difference between the Democratic and Republican parties. While Elton was continuing his utterance his host offered him some Madeira of which he was proud, having recently bought it from the estate of a famous restaurateur.

"No, I can't take any, thank you; I have an enemy which forbids," he responded. "And unfortunately it is not my own enjoyment for which I am paying, as I inherit my gout from my father."

"I suppose his father was some gentleman's butler," growled Bridgmond, who disliked the man, although of the same party.

The young Englishman would naturally have caught this sentiment from his friend; but he found there was an entertaining vein in Mr. Elton which prevented his being disagreeable, even though one endeavored to think him so. He seemed desirous of pleasing Montresor, and undeniably succeeded; and it was with some degree of pleasure that the latter received an invitation to call upon him when he went to Washington, the politician adding, in a jocular way:



"You know, it is etiquette you should call upon me, and, of course, we can never think of giving up our sovereign prerogatives, for which we fought so hard with you in two wars."

"I am glad it is so," returned Montresor, "because if it were the other way about, *you* might forget to call, and *I* shall not."

He attributed his interest in Mr. Elton to a desire for information about politicians and the Irish question; but it was more than this.

Men are so much alike that the ways pleasing a large number in one country will assuredly have some effect upon those of another. For twenty years it had been Mr. Elton's business to please. In all the various offices which he had held, from one in a county court to one in the Cabinet, his dominant idea had been to obtain some hold upon every man with whom he came in contact. He found that this could not be done by antagonistic methods—at least he could not do it. His retentive memory enabled him not only to remember faces, but to recall some distinguishing facts about each individual. Although the allusions he made to the part taken in history by Montresor's family flattered the latter's pride—a necessary accompaniment of the fact that one has something to be proud of—and gave a notion of range and thoroughness far above the truth, there was nothing more in it than a faculty for storing away any facts which he thought might be of some bearing in personal intercourse. His knowledge of Montresor's family had been acquired because he had a cousin prominent in English politics, especially upon the Irish question. Whilst making constant use of Irish passions and prejudices, he did

not think it important to know the rights and wrongs of that historic struggle, but was satisfied to learn the personal antecedents of a man with whom he might have to deal, should any dispute upon such a point arise between England and the United States. Were he to gain a concession from this Englishman in the interests of an Irish-American citizen, it would not be because he could show it right or humane, but because he could influence the other's personality. This had not been thought out in cold analysis, but was unconscious reasoning, and the result of much experience—let it be confessed, successful experience.

While talking they walked into the drawing-room and joined Mrs. Morton. In the course of conversation she asked Montresor when he would go to Washington, who answered that he intended going the next day, unless he was detained. She overruled all evasions, and by direct questioning elicited the whole MacManus incident, finally offering to go with him to the hospital so insistently as to preclude refusal; then, as Elton joined the hostess, leaving them alone, they at once renewed their animated conversation of the dinner-table.

Mrs. Thompson watched the pair with interest and approval. She was not unwilling that her daughters should marry English noblemen, or at least into noble families; so even a second son was not to be neglected. Being a woman of discernment, she saw that the first step must be to break up his fancy for Mrs. Rae, who, as a widow, might bag the game. She realized that a diversion made by Mrs. Morton might not only cool Montresor's ardor toward Mrs. Rae, but matters would probably be precipitated by

the last-named lady herself, as there was little liking between the cousins. She expected to spend the winter in Washington, and would there find opportunities of bringing her daughters naturally in contact with him, trusting to them for improving the occasion.

Thus it happened, as the dinner party broke up, that all were pleased—the hostess for the reason above given; the host because he had managed to extract an indirect promise from Elton regarding certain bills before Congress; Mrs. Morton and Montresor because of their rapid *rapprochement*; Bridgmond because the dinner was good; and Elton was pleased because *he* had pleased.

## CHAPTER VI

### AN IMPORTANT EXPEDITION

THE next afternoon Montresor called upon Mrs. Morton to accompany her in her visitation of the sick. Feeling that his interest in this lady needed an excuse, he called it a philosophic desire to study social types in America. In this double-dealing with his conscience he was in good company, since it is quite the custom of social reformers to hob-nob with the most depraved, in order that they may know—*and describe*—the last phase of vileness. He was received with free cordiality by this unconscious specimen of his analysis.

They found MacManus a trifle worse, and, seeing that Mrs. Morton was an awkward ministering angel, Montresor proposed they should speak to another patient, in whom he had become interested, and then leave. As they were doing so a man with a smooth-shaven face, dressed in a black suit and holding in his hand a broad-brimmed silk top-hat, entered and proceeded directly to the bedside of MacManus. It was so dark by this time that his features could not be seen distinctly, and, except the fact that his height was above the average, his general appearance attracted no special attention. In a moment this was changed when, laying down his hat, he placed around his neck a stole, drawn from an inner pocket, and they recognized a priest ministering to the sick.

There are few persons whose sympathies are so dull as not to have some feeling of solemnity upon such an occasion, and the Englishman's interest became still more intense when the priest, bending low, seemed to be hearing a communication from the patient, made with painful but determined effort.

In the midst of this there appeared a man in an ulster, similar to the one worn by MacManus' companion at the political meeting, and, Montresor's general sense of recognition being followed by closer observation, he saw it was Robinson—Mrs. Morton making the same discovery and announcing it under her breath. There was nothing strange in this to either of them, for they both were aware that his sentiments were ostentatiously Irish; and Mrs. Morton knew, which Montresor did not, that, although of opposite politics to Elton, he was supposed, at critical moments, to be of service to him with the Irish vote.

The orderly on duty was moving toward MacManus' bedside, when, observing the priest's earnest attitude, he paused, whispered to Robinson, whom he was conducting, and left him standing there, while he went to a neighboring ward. In the two rows of white-counterpaned beds the skeleton patients lay, lashed down by tightly drawn clothing, impotent, indifferent and silent; so that it almost seemed to Montresor, who was screened by the deeper shadows, that the three men at whom they looked were the only living creatures present besides themselves.

So earnest was MacManus in what he was saying that he did not at first notice the newcomer, but presently, glancing in that direction, recognized him.

A cloud which had hung along the western horizon, assisting the early coming of wintry darkness, now drifted away, thus illumining, by the light from an adjacent window, the faces of both priest and patient. In that of the latter could be seen a troubled indecision which might come from a high sense of the responsibility involved in what he was saying. This and the faltering of his voice were apparently noted by the priest, who, at once following the other's glance, seemed also to know Robinson and show resentful disapproval. His form stiffened and, with knitted brows, he glanced haughtily—almost contemptuously—and, although his words were not distinguishable, they seemed, while calm and paternal, to have the ring of military command.

Robinson's appearance, as he entered, had not suggested sympathy with the sick. From his gleaming silk hat, which he lacked the manners to remove, down to his well-varnished boots, his person and bearing flashed an impudent, flippant prosperity and well-being out of touch with suffering. Business brought him and business would speedily take him away. When he saw the priest he removed his hat and stood waiting with impatient condescension to propriety; but as he realized the character of the looks directed toward himself his face assumed an appearance of impertinent defiance—such defiance as almost to imply apprehension. He resembled, Montresor said afterward, a man defending himself with a pistol he knows to be unloaded. There may have been some doubt about this interpretation; but there could be no denial of the anxious distress which deepened upon MacManus' features as he continued to regard Robinson, and reached its climax as the

latter, when the priest's ministrations were finished, advanced to the bedside.

The two onlookers seized this favorable moment to escape unobserved, and on their way out met the orderly returning. Montresor stopped him and, saying he understood the doctors did not wish Mac-Manus to see many visitors, advised that the interview then taking place be terminated. He emphasized this advice by a five-dollar bill; and, from the assurances given, was confident this flank movement for the patient's relief would prove successful.

Pausing again for a few minutes to ask some questions of a young resident physician, it was quite dark when they emerged, which caused Mrs. Morton to make some rather strained and affected remarks about being out so late.

They soon found their carriage, and the driver was directed, at her request, to take them to a church in the vicinity of her own hotel. Whether, because he was paid by the hour, or because he imagined a good-looking man and a pretty woman would not quarrel if a little late in reaching their destination, the cabman drove quite leisurely and did not take the most direct route.

The carriage at length stopped in the full glare of a street lamp, and Mrs. Morton, glancing first at the light and then at the driver as she descended, emitted an angry remark about "such stupidity." Then she thanked Montresor for his kindness in "giving her a lift" with a frigidity of manner that did not augur well for the pleasure of their drive. With a chuckle, the cabman said to himself, "I guess he didn't strike it right"; while Montresor, whose mien was ab-

stracted, gave a quiet, indulgent smile and, re-entering the cab, was driven to his hotel.

Without knowing the cause of such a change in her behavior, I feel sure, from my acquaintance with the two persons concerned, and after-events, that Montresor did not deserve such pointed reproof. Paraphrasing St. Paul's "All things to all men," he was many things to many women. The high, somewhat old-fashioned courtliness with which he instinctively treated Lady Broadlands' familiar set degenerated, through an unconsciously graduated scale, into a complacent camaraderie with those jolly, slap-on-the-back women friends inevitable to this sport-loving "man's man" of the smart set. A reserve of treatment natural toward the Ladies Gwendolin, Gladys, and Geraldine would be deemed positively uncivil when they bore the nicknames Bobbles, Bubbles, and Boobles. To the latter class he had assigned Mrs. Morton, without appreciating that, in America, even light women do not like being dealt with lightly. At the Thompsons' dinner he had taken her simply as a lovely Thais provided by the gods—following Dryden's injunction and man's ineradicable inclination. She had somewhat flatteringly forced herself upon him as his companion in this expedition, and, I have no doubt, he merely endeavored to fulfil agreeably his duty as host.

When he entered the carriage, only the least important half of that dual brain with which man is endowed occupied itself with Mrs. Morton and her insincere chatter, the other being intent upon what he had just witnessed in the hospital. The scene must have had, at the time, pronounced values and a defined perspective, which neither his graphic pow-



ers nor my own have been able to reproduce; for, until it faded, with the lapse of days, in the light of calm reason, it possessed for him an absorbing significance.

The apparent intimacy between Robinson and MacManus—so distant socially—as shown at the mass-meeting, and a marked fear and distrust indicated at the hospital, were translated by Montresor's aroused imagination into the more occult affiliation of some Fenian organization. And in the priest's hostile attitude toward the intruding emissary he saw the Church of Rome, proud and jealous, waging secret but implacable warfare, striving to drive the bat-like creature of organized violence back into the shadowy darkness, whence, with skinny wing, it had issued, breathing its pestilential influence, fatal alike to religion and all wholesome political aspiration. Moreover, an unreasoning dislike for Robinson gave him a certain sense of pleasure in fitting upon him theories of aggressive Irish agitation—and possible intrigue against himself—which, he shortly afterward admitted, verged upon the fantastic. Whatever the truth may have been, his thoughts were occupied on such lines, much to the exclusion of Mrs. Morton; and if, in what he politely meant as responsive intercourse, he made some careless technical error, according to her code, it seems, when I remember the extenuating circumstances, a not unforgivable offense.

At the hospital, next day, he found MacManus much improved, and was told that his daughter, who was in service at Washington, had come on to be near him. She was very desirous, the orderly said, of seeing Montresor, to express her gratitude for his

kindness ; but, being naturally averse to such a manifestation, he managed to avoid meeting her during the two following days.

Soon after breakfast, on the third morning, a card of fashionable size and engraving, bearing the inscription, "Rev. P. Vincent, S. J.," was brought to him, the hotel boy saying there was also a lady.

When they entered, Montresor recognized the priest he had seen at the hospital, the full daylight showing his countenance to be singularly attractive both in feature and expression. In Vibert's masterpiece, "*L'Histoire d'un Missionnaire*," a simple and zealous missionary, amidst a crowd of frivolous ecclesiasts, is telling of his work to one attentive listener, who has the calm, intellectual brow and sternly handsome face of Napoleon. It is hardly too flattering to Father Vincent when I say that he blended the simple earnestness of the one with the dominating intelligence of the other.

In a gentle voice, with a foreign accent so slight that it was impossible by it to detect his nationality, he explained that he had brought MacManus' daughter Mary, who wished to render her thanks in person.

The girl was a handsome specimen of pure Irish type, and, although she looked at Montresor with open, fearless eyes, her speech was unusually shy and hesitating. When, after some conversation, Montresor said that, before leaving that afternoon for Washington, he would like to hear how the patient was doing, Father Vincent replied he would stop on his way back from the hospital and report.

Shortly before luncheon he returned, and, having told of MacManus' condition, said to Montresor, somewhat abruptly, tempered, however, by his modu-

lated voice, so that it did not seem a break in the conversation:

"Doubtless you think it strange I should show such eagerness to bring you news of MacManus; but, frankly, my wish was to have a few words with you alone. Without understanding all the circumstances, which, some of them being personal, I would have no right to go into, you cannot appreciate how deep an impression your kindness has made upon him. You, perhaps, regard it as a little matter you would do for any one whose distress was so evident. Although it is only as a priest that I have known his family, yet I understand their characters so intimately that I have no hesitation in calling them my friends. It is not as a priest, then, but as a man, that I ask you, if, when MacManus comes to Washington, he shows what may seem to you extravagant gratitude, not to rebuff him. For, not only do I know him to be sincere, but I think it is likely to have a beneficial effect upon political views with which his mind has been unfortunately prejudiced."

Montresor hastened to assure him that, while undeserving so much gratitude, he would be careful not to injure the friendly understanding which he felt existed between them.

"I hope," said Father Vincent, "you do not regard my saying this as an impertinence, or that I am unmindful of your time or convenience, thinking only of benefiting MacManus—'the end justifying the means'—isn't that what you say of us Jesuits?"

"I could stand a much more severe plot against my peace," said Montresor, laughing; "and I hope you will not consider me the typical John Bull in his dread of a Jesuit, for I should like very much to meet

you again in Washington—I see by your card you are living in Georgetown, which, I believe, is a part of Washington.”

“I am glad to say,” replied Father Vincent, “that it is most likely we shall meet, for I have many good friends in the circle most likely to claim you.”

“Are there many Catholics in Washington?” Montresor was led to ask by the other’s response.

“Oh, yes,” was the reply; “you know, its site was originally a part of Maryland, which was settled by Lord Baltimore, a Catholic. Both in Baltimore and Washington many of the most prominent families belong to our church, which is an advantage. Last winter was my first visit to Washington; but, as I happened to know several members of the Diplomatic Corps, and also had letters to Washingtonians from some English people, I have rapidly enlarged my circle of friends.”

This led to further conversation upon a variety of topics, in which Father Vincent gave evidence of being a remarkable combination of the priestly man of the world (like Disraeli’s Monseigneur Catesby) with a pious naïveté. This latter quality, evincing itself in frank and explicit speech regarding the motives of others, and his own as well, was of philosophic interest to Montresor, from the fact that the priest belonged to the Order of the Jesuits, which, although famous during four centuries for discipline, adventurous, persistent courage, and deep strategy, is not associated in the English mind with the simpler virtues. Nor, remembering the antagonism shown toward Robinson, could Montresor refrain from indulging in the fancy that perhaps this trained and powerful band might become arrayed against the

Fenians, rather than see the Church of Rome surrender its supremacy over the Irish people.

One of the Englishmen who had given letters to Father Vincent was a man named Campbell, a friend of Montresor, who, in speaking of him, said to Father Vincent:

"Your church made a great coup when it captured Campbell, a pretty fast liver and, every one thought, a confirmed agnostic. How did you manage it?"

After saying this, he felt doubtful as to whether it was in good taste and might not hurt the other's feelings; but the priest, smiling, replied:

"I suppose it will confirm your worst suspicions when I tell you he was made to see the truth by a Jesuit. If you remember that his family are strict Presbyterians, and in his youth he was driven with a hard hand, you will understand the only way he could be successfully guided was by now and then 'giving him his head.' Our church has, during centuries of experience, learned that not only must the racial character be studied, but the personal as well. If ever men could be driven into religion, that day has passed long since, and the only hope of permanent advance for any church is to reconcile the man with essential Christian belief."

As Father Vincent had taken this so well, Montresor was emboldened to another remark:

"What you say about 'essential belief' tempts me to admit I have often been puzzled that in Catholic countries, where your church is paramount, it insists rigidly on abstract belief, and also upon attendance at church, yet sometimes allows much latitude in manners, and perhaps in morals."

"Pardon," responded the priest, still with a reassuring smile, "another sporty illustration. In sailing, if you find the wind is against you, you tack, and eventually, by going zig-zag, arrive where a fair breeze would have carried you more directly. Still, it is important to be sure of your direction—that your compass is all right. Therefore, we insist upon 'abstract belief'—that is, the right direction—because it is necessary, whereas absolute rectitude is not. Is that Jesuitical casuistry?"

"Anyway," replied Montresor, laughing, "it's good seamanship."

Father Vincent took his leave, Montresor reiterating his hope that they should meet in Washington.

It may seem strange that the latter should so readily fall into a course which might result in much contact with persons naturally on the political side of the Irish question which was opposed to the English Government. Moreover, after the scene in the hospital, he had been impressed with a fancy that perhaps MacManus and Robinson were both members of some Fenian organization.

But Montresor's character presented a rather unusual combination of imaginative activity and hard common-sense, the latter prevailing whenever any definite step was to be taken. The sensitive tentacles of his mind, always making their quivering search, might discover dangers where a more stolid person would not; but, when emergencies were to be met, none could excel him in cool, resolute device. Besides, is there not in every one some of the feeling of that boy who said his prayers at night, but not in the morning, "because I can take care of myself in the daytime"? In the black night, looking upon

the blacker waters, hearing the groaning of the spars and the wind shrieking in the cordage, the attack on shipboard seemed certainly murderous; in his snug cabin it became unlikely; but on shore the lack of sufficient motive made such a theory appear preposterous.

While there might be some connection between Robinson and MacManus, the scene in the hospital did not suggest friendship; and the priest's manner placed him above suspicion. That he had an exaggerated prejudice against Robinson, "the reason why he could not tell," he, in moments of calm reflection, frankly acknowledged to himself, and now resolved not to let any mere theory influence the nature of his relations with persons who otherwise seemed perfectly trustworthy.

It was not these matters, therefore, but rather those of his heart which gave him concern as, speeding toward Washington on the "Congressional Limited," he looked out from his window into the gathering darkness and felt himself subjected to the calm scrutiny of a distant, newly risen planet. Out of those serene depths there came a pervading sense of reproach, convicting him of instability—almost of deceit. His jolly of Mrs. Morton—for it could not be called a flirtation—had meant nothing; it was not new in his life, nor was he under pledges to Mrs. Rae. He had never pretended to be better than other men—and yet he knew that, when they met, he would expect her at any time to discover the impostor lurking in him. And there arose within his heart a cowardly instinct of evasion.

Perhaps it would be better to consort with Mrs. Morton's kind—they were not so silently exacting.

## CHAPTER VII

### SOME GAY WASHINGTONIANS

"SUPPOSE we walk up Connecticut Avenue and then call on Mrs. Winton," said Bridgmond to Montresor, as, one Sunday afternoon, they stood at the window of the Metropolitan Club in Washington.

Montresor assenting, they started forth; but, instead of proceeding directly, went by way of St. John's Church, as they wished to know if service there was over. At Lafayette Square they strolled along under trees, the bare limbs of which joined overhead in groined Gothic arches, with a delicate tracery of branches outlined against the evening sky, still red with the glow of the setting sun. They had scarcely arrived, however, when the service ended; and so they joined the throng which made its way up Connecticut Avenue, meeting crowds of Sunday citizens enjoying their weekly promenade. Montresor continued to be rather an absent-minded and unobserving companion, paying little heed to the running comments of his friend.

As they entered the house he glanced into one of the small reception-rooms, and was at first rather startled at what he saw. Upon a divan there reclined, almost at full length, a couple whose faces he did not see sufficiently well to recognize. The man's frock coat was thrown back negligently, and



the woman, clad in one of Worth's masterpieces, showed a glimpse of exquisite lingerie, as well as the turn of a dainty ankle. These details, and the fact that they were members of a merry group, were only partly taken in at the time, as the friends hurried on to the room where the hostess was receiving.

They were, almost immediately, handed on into still another room, where, around a steaming Russian samovar, several young ladies assisted in pouring tea. This was the center to which thronged all persons wishing to be attached or detached. Montresor, after enduring for some minutes the twitting of a young girl, whose acquaintance he had only made a few days before, as to the fact that "She" was not in the room, made a polite excuse and moved away, perhaps with some curiosity, seeking the place in which he had seen the couple on the divan. He found that the feminine part of it was Mrs. Morton, and the masculine an army officer. Others were there, all in merry mood.

"Oh, we are having Sunday-school, Mr. Montresor," cried out Mrs. Morton, as he entered, "and you are late. To make up for it, I hope you know your lesson very well."

"May I say, 'Now I lay me . . . ?'" Montresor questioned, as he placed himself—much more conventionally, however, than herself—upon a vacant portion of the divan.

"Yes, if you behave yourself," she responded, while the others laughed in a manner intended to disconcert her, but without effect.

"Now, I am ready for the questions," Montresor said. "Who is the teacher?"

"I am," quickly spoke up Professor Donelly, a



" Suppose we walk up Connecticut Avenue "

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man Montresor had met before, an American with an Irish name, with the accent on the penultimate syllable, pronounced as if it were Italian.

The Professor was a rather thin, tallish man, who did not wear glasses, dressed remarkably well, and appeared to be about thirty-three. He had commenced his career in charge of a mine in the West, where his predecessors either met violent deaths or else found some excuse for resigning; but, by a combination of kindness and decision, of justice to the men, and summary dealing with those who rebelled, he managed to survive, and get home with both honors and ducats, having invented a process in metallurgy which revolutionized mining. Strange to say, with all his reputation for reckless courage, he was a monomaniac upon the healthfulness of houses and food; excluding wall-paper for fear of arsenic, and scrutinizing eatables with a caution worthy of the melancholy analytical chemist figuring as waiter in one of Dickens' novels. He had a wife, neither handsome nor young, who was a good advertisement for the success of his health theories, for her vast proportions and nativity in one of the Southern States had earned her the soubriquet of "The Solid South." She excluded herself almost entirely from general society, but did not wish her husband to imitate her in this respect.

"I think," continued the Professor, "we had gone as far as Sin."

"Oh, for shame!" cried one of the men. "We never go as far as that—never—never—n-e-v-e-r." The last doubtfully.

"Don't interrupt," said the Professor, "but answer me. What is Sin?"

"Things that are found out," was the response.

"That's the Spartan definition," said the Professor. "I shall have to ask you, Mr. Montresor, as it's your turn."

"Breach of etiquette," the latter had hardly time to say, when:

"That's Chinese and German," came from a niece of the hostess, teasing a German next to her.

"Well, what's your definition?" the Professor asked of her.

"What the other fellow does," was the quick response.

"That's Scotch," shot in the German, glad to have a retort, as the lady was proud of her Scotch blood.

"Then, Baron," said the Professor, "you will have to answer it."

"Pleasures untasted or outlived," came as a rather slow pronouncement.

"That, I should say," replied the Professor, "is Sanscrit or Browning, and not in our book. Ladies and gentlemen—shall I say young ladies and young gentlemen?—I am surprised that here in the nation's capital, with the advantage of daily intercourse with the Diplomatic Corps, you do not seem to know what Sin is. I will try you on its opposite. Mr. Montresor, will you tell us what is Virtue?"

"Its own reward," replied Montresor.

"True, but rather too indefinite—you don't commit yourself," said the Professor.

"Do I commit a sin or a virtue when I don't commit myself?" returned Montresor, feeling rather ashamed of introducing such a barefaced pun, for which, of course, he was at once reproved by the teacher.

"We must not have so much punning. There is no authority for it in the Bible, even for an Englishman."

"Oh, yes, there is," replied Montresor, this time more sure of himself, "for when it was said, 'On this rock I found my church,' there was a pun on Peter's name. Petra means a rock, I think, doesn't it?"

"I can't allow my scholars to dispute," returned the Professor, with mock severity. "Can you tell us, Mrs. Morton, what is Virtue?"

"It's trying to get a higher price," she responded, glibly. "You know, the Bible says of a virtuous woman, 'her price is above rubies'—United States bonds, for instance."

"There, now," exclaimed the Professor, with satisfaction, "here is a lady who knows her lesson. Neither of those men beside you told you, I hope?"

"Oh, no," she responded, laughing; "with some people virtue is easy."

One of the party was Mr. Elton—it was said he might generally be found where Mrs. Morton was—but, while enjoying the fun, he had not taken any part in the responses. The Professor, however, who was no respecter of persons, turned to him and said:

"Well, now, Elton, I don't think we can let you off any longer. Politicians require this sort of instruction. I will give you an easy one. What is a lie?"

"I—don't—know," responded he, with simulated simplicity.

"Your illustration is quite sufficient," retorted the Professor, much to the enjoyment of the others.

"Well," said Elton, "you know, we politicians get used to being made object-lessons of."

"Teacher," interjected Mrs. Morton, "please look at Mr. Montresor. He is as solemn as an owl. I really think he must have got religion."

"Probably he is reflecting on your sins," replied the Professor; "but I think we had better leave the abstract and see what you know about Bible history. Mrs. Morton, can you tell us who was the first man?"

There was a general giggle at this, and, before she could reply, one of the other ladies said:

"There never was a *first* man."

"Oh, yes," spoke up a member of the English Legation, named Murray; "the last man is always 'the first,' that the Scripture may be fulfilled."

"These people know all about it, you see," said Mrs. Morton, extending her open palms, "so ask me another; why don't you ask about some of those—interesting Bible stories?"

"Oh, no," returned the Professor, "I dare not do that. You must remember this is a Sunday-school class. But I will ask you what you know about Daniel."

Mrs. Morton hesitated, and then said: "Daniel had a lion show—was a wise young judge, and had something to do with one of David's wives, Bersheba——"

"Oh, no, he didn't," the Professor interrupted. "You are all off. Where did you get that notion?"

"Why, I've often heard," responded she, "the expression 'From Dan to Bersheba.'"

"Oh, that's geographical," explained the Professor; "and David's wife was not named *Bersheba*,

but *Bathsheba*. Mr. Montresor, can you tell us anything about her?"

"She was the *incomprisé* wife of Uriah," was the reply.

"Oh, that's enough; your answer won't improve my class," exclaimed the Professor. "Now, who can tell me about Noah? Can you?" turning to the army officer.

"I don't think that's a fair question," the latter replied. "He didn't belong to my arm of the service. Besides, I'm not old enough. Don't you think you'd better tell us about him yourself?"

Every one laughed at this allusion to age, as the Professor was popularly supposed to be older than he looked. To put a stop to this he hurried on:

"I suppose that the story of Noah was a biblical allegory to illustrate Darwin's idea of the survival of the fittest; of which I hope you will observe I am the most modern example, having answered a question which all the rest of you failed to do."

At this point Mrs. Winton's niece and one or two others started, in a low voice, the college song:

"Old Noah he—got on a spree,  
And sent his son to Afrikee.  
Do you belong to Gideon's band?  
Oh, here's my heart and here's my hand."

In the midst of this Mrs. Winton came in.

"We are having a Salvation Army meeting," exclaimed one of the party to her, in answer to her look of surprise.

"More likely Starvation Army," she replied, good-naturedly. "Don't you all want some tea?"

"Tea!" exclaimed Mrs. Morton. "I have had so



much that I feel positively tipsy, and as if I could break all of the ten commandments."

"Please let me escort you home," clamored several men at once, and with a laugh they began to disperse.

Montresor, who had not felt very intimate with any of the party, regarded Mrs. Morton's frequently bringing him into the arena, so to speak, as a kind intention to make him feel at home; and, to a certain extent, this had been the effect. For, though at intervals he appeared a little awkward, and did not join in the laughter as heartily as the others—which Mrs. Morton called "looking as solemn as an owl"—yet, when called upon to speak, he had thrown himself into it with spirit, and in the end had felt quite at his ease.

He had seen Mrs. Morton several times since his arrival in Washington, and, while perfectly polite to him, she had, until this last occasion, exhibited a constraint in her manner which showed she was still unforgiving. But when he found, as he thought, that she had taken pains to do him a good turn and prevent his feeling awkward, he came to the conclusion that she had relented, and felt a sense of gratitude toward her. As they were leaving at the same time, he asked permission to accompany her home, which was readily given. Several other people were going in the same direction, but passed on when Montresor and Mrs. Morton reached her door.

As soon as they were thus left alone he was again treated with the same frigid commonplaces as before. He made some remarks which showed his thought, to which she replied:

"I at least expected that you would, as soon as

possible, seek some opportunity of apologizing to me."

Montresor, who had not really felt much distressed at the distance which Mrs. Morton had insisted upon keeping, and was only evincing, as he thought, a little common politeness in the effort to resume amiable relations, felt himself placed in an awkward position by this speech. It seemed to call upon him to take her seriously and to explain an inexplicably foolish impulse. However, as he was in for it, he said:

"I thought you were treating me very badly, to get in such a temper and cut me up for what I could not resist. Remember, there are other intoxicants than wine."

"Yes; but it was so mean of you to take advantage of my situation, for you knew that I did not want to attract attention and make a scandal. I suppose I ought not to have gone to the hospital with you, or have driven back at that hour, but I can never think of conventionalities as much as I ought. Still, I don't see how you could have so misunderstood me."

Montresor began to think he had, perhaps, really misjudged her, and felt proportionately ashamed of himself.

"Do you mean, Mrs. Morton, that I deliberately took advantage of you? Do you not know that nothing of the sort entered my mind; it was just such a piece of thoughtlessness as you yourself might have been guilty of."

"I might have forgiven more easily," she said, in a lowered voice, "if I could have thought it was the result of genuine feeling."

Fortunately for Montresor, who was not prepared with a reply to this cue, the conversation, which had been pursued upon the doorstep, was terminated by the opening of the door and the appearance of a servant. As it was too late for anything but a perfunctory offer and declination of entry, he took his leave, promising to come very soon to see her.

While walking home he was compelled to ponder over the situation, and its analysis brought him little comfort.

Since his arrival in Washington he had, as he expected, seen Mrs. Rae frequently, and had been even more attracted toward her than upon the steamer, where not the most ardent fancy could justly picture her beauty and charm in the varied environment of a gay capital. But the feeling of self-distrust which had stolen upon him as he was on the way to Washington took a firmer hold when he realized how natural—how true—she seemed under all circumstances. The distinction which marked her in the most notable assemblage appeared to him real, while that of the others was artificial—as if, mounted upon wooden stilts, anxiously balancing themselves, at any moment some stone of accident might bring them to earth. The desire and attempt to resume their ocean voyage's delightful intimacy he frankly regarded as a tawdry trick upon a trustful princess—although his heart constantly forced him to seek it. On her part, too, there was a trifle more of constraint than there had been on shipboard. Altogether, as she had said, life afloat was much simpler than ashore.

Now the situation was rendered not less complex by Mrs. Morton's speech. Had he really mistaken

her character and, like a stupid fool, uselessly wounded her self-respect in return for generous friendliness?—a little too generous, perhaps; but, still, as a man of the world and a gentleman, he should have been able to discriminate. It really seemed as if he had behaved like a cad and rendered himself still less worthy of Mrs. Rae's friendship. Could he, by pretending to Mrs. Morton an interest he did not really feel—thus justifying himself with her—render atonement to Mrs. Rae? No; that was too foolish. Did he owe some such action of conventional consistency to his own self-rehabilitation? Those were questions upon which a mind like Montresor's could reason indefinitely. Meanwhile he would drift—or think he was drifting. For in reality everybody in Washington could see his jealous devotion to Mrs. Rae, and most people thought she was more conscious of it than she had ever before shown herself of men's adoration. If, inwardly, he was beset with scruples, doubts, and perplexities, outwardly he behaved like any other brisk, common-sense lover. He directed a stream of sweets and roses at her, and was greedily artful in securing her company, keeping it against all comers. Granted that he mixed freely with the other sort of women and answered to their moods, yet his manner toward Katherine was something apart, and, although, perhaps, pleasing, was embarrassingly palpable.

While, therefore, he may have pondered deeply, as he says he did, about his duty to Mrs. Morton, no one, that I am aware of, saw any evidence of it—not even that lady herself.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MONTRESOR'S IDEAL IN TROUBLE

IN pursuance of his promise, Montresor called several times upon Mrs. Morton; and, although generally finding her at home, there were always others present. Still, with such meetings, and casual ones elsewhere, he probably saw more of her than of any other woman except Mrs. Rae.

From constant thought of the latter he began to have a feeling of ownership; which, as he neither realized it himself nor claimed any recognition of it from her, gave him many unhappy quarters of an hour. A jealousy totally foreign to his previous experience or to his real nature seized upon him, perverting his vision and making him foolishly exacting toward the one woman he really wished to exalt; which feeling, at first vague and general, became gradually more definite and acute as it was aroused by Robinson, who had by this time arrived in Washington.

This man, without any obvious attraction, save a certain versatility, frequently met Mrs. Rae at social entertainments; and at times she showed what seemed like dislike for him, yet was never so repellant as to prevent his continually seeking her society. Once Montresor ventured, in what he thought was a casual manner, to ask if she had known Robinson

long. She hesitated, and answered, in an equally careless manner :

"Oh, I've known him for quite a long time, but never intimately." Then, her voice becoming grave, she added : "He was a friend of Mr. Rae's."

Montresor felt like a prying culprit, and hastened into a discussion of Robinson's versatility, ignoring the allusion to her husband, although it was the first time that she had ever mentioned him.

Not many days after this he was on his way from the club to see a friend who lived in G Street, in the southwestern part of the town, a locality which, while eminently respectable, was unfashionable and little frequented. In the early dusk of winter he distinguished, at a short distance ahead of him, the figures of a man and woman walking, and conversing in an apparently close and most familiar manner. They were proceeding quite slowly, but suddenly came to a standstill, shook hands, and the lady, hurriedly turning, went off by another street. He had already been somewhat startled by thinking that, from the figure, and frock of latest English model, he had recognized Mrs. Rae, and he was now confirmed in this impression as the light of a street lamp fell momentarily upon her features. The man pursued his walk in the same direction, but, by the time Montresor reached his own destination, he had sufficiently overtaken him to recognize, with surprise and chagrin, the object of his most strenuous dislike, Robinson.

He was puzzled, distressed, and angry at what seemed like duplicity upon Mrs. Rae's part. Or, if her apparent dislike was real, what hold had this

man upon her to force, even for a time, so intimate an interview?

Unfortunately for them both, Montresor met her at dinner that evening, and he was assigned to take her in. He could not delay, and at the first opportunity broached the subject uppermost in his thoughts.

"I regretted very much not being able to join you this evening, but had an engagement which forced me on. I see you got home safely."

"What do you mean?" responded she. "This is the first time I have seen you to-day."

There was not the slightest start or tremor in her manner or voice, and she looked at him naturally and inquiringly.

"I did not think that you had seen *me*, but I saw you in G Street at about a quarter of six, and your cavalier had the bad taste to desert you—or, rather, you deserted him."

"I was nowhere in that neighborhood either at that time or any other to-day, so it must have been some other woman. At the hour you mention I was at home, having a solitary cup of tea."

"Then it must be," said he, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice, "because I have you so much in mind that you are 'projected,' as you Washingtonian psychologists would call it; but, I must say, into localities and company which I should not voluntarily choose for you."

He seemed perfectly unconscious of the tone of proprietorship in the close of his speech; but Mrs. Rae did not resent it.

Presently, returning to the attack in a blind, un-

reasoning fashion, he added: "Then you know nothing about the corner of G and Blank streets?"

To his surprise she seemed more affected by this last shot. A frown quickly passed across her brow, and she gave him a look of pride and indignation; but, immediately recovering her coolness, replied:

"All I know of it is that, according to Mr. Robinson's card, he lives on one of those corners." Then, laughingly: "Now that you have cornered me, I suppose I may ask what the engagement was which was 'projecting *you* into localities, and perhaps company, which I should not myself voluntarily choose for you.' Is that a correct quotation?"

"I was on my way to see a friend," said Montresor. "One who is a friend of yours, as well. Can you say the same?"

"You forget that I told you I was not there," responded she. "But tell me about this friend of yours whom you were going to see. What a pity it is that in English the word 'friend' has no sex."

"As soon as it has, it ceases to be a friend," replied Montresor, again with delicate sarcasm.

"Has Mr. Montresor inveigled you into one of his metaphysical discussions?" said Elton, who was seated on the other side of Mrs. Rae.

"Yes," said she, "if that means, as I have heard, that neither person understands what the other, or himself, is talking about."

"I am sorry Mrs. Rae takes that view of it," said Montresor, "for the title of our debate was, I believe, 'Friendship,' and I, at least, thought that I knew something about that."

"No," returned she, "we were speaking of 'friends,' and one hardly every knows *them*."



"Oh, yes," said Elton, "you do if you are in politics and make a business of it, as I do. I have five thousand that I can call by name, and our friend Mr. Blaine has a great many more."

"That is one more reason to wish you were a man. Mrs. Rae," joined in Robinson from the other side of the table; for Elton and Montresor both being engaged with the same lady had caused a turning of heads, which ran round the table in opposite directions until it left Robinson no one to talk to.

"I have reason enough already for wishing to be a man," returned Mrs. Rae, with some warmth.

"One of which is that you would not, in such a case, be placed where you are," interposed Montresor, in what he intended to be purely a bantering tone.

"Oh, no," said she; "it isn't half a bad place."

"Which half isn't bad?" asked Robinson.

"Don't I remember something at school about fractions being vulgar?" said Mrs. Rae, with a touch of asperity. "So let us stop before we get to that point."

Montresor disliked everything about this conversation except what he himself had said, which he regarded as clever. He disliked Mrs. Rae's saying she preferred to be a man, and did not think that Robinson would have joined in the conversation with so much assurance and familiarity if he had felt doubtful about his reception.

After dinner a number of people came in, as there was to be some music and recitation. Among these were the Thompsons, who had taken a house for the winter, and, as a matter of course, Bridgmond and the Professor, who were at almost every smart gath-

ering in Washington. Montresor gravitated toward the group of which they formed a part. He had not been there long when they were threatened with overflow by a party of young girls, who, arriving in a herdick, had been backed up to the pavement and poured out in a giggling flood; which, after a brief eddy into the dressing-room, broke gurgling past the hostess.

Seeing this, Miss Thompson, with much presence of mind, said to him:

"Don't you think it would be a good plan to go over and join Mrs. Morton?"

He gave her his arm and they threaded their way through the crowd, his partner being frequently stopped with greetings of cordiality from friends of her own sex, which always seems especially affectionate toward a girl who has a desirable man with her. They found Mrs. Morton talking to one of the secretaries of the German Legation, who spoke rather poor English for a clever man, which he undoubtedly was, and which made most people think he could do better if he tried. Sometimes it was fancied that he enjoyed his own mistakes.

"We came over to hear what you were talking about," said Miss Thompson.

"What we talk about?" quickly spoke up the German. "We are *disgusting* Mrs. Morton. Is that not a charming object? I wish always to haf Mrs. Morton for an object."

"You were not *discussing* me at all," said Mrs. Morton; "you were discussing my *gown*, and you were trying to express your admiration for it. What do you think, Mr. Montresor! He said he liked it

because it was so 'frank.' What do you suppose, now, he means by that?"

"Frank—that is a very good word, which I found in my dictionary yesterday. It means 'open,' it 'does not congeal'—congeal?—or *conceal*, you say?"

Mrs. Morton laughed heartily, with a loud, raucous voice, and the others joined in, including Miss Thompson, who, however, presently checked herself, and looked disapproving, but not embarrassed.

"You horrid man!" said Mrs. Morton. "I'm sure my dress is not different from any other in the room."

"He only means to say," said Bridgmond, who had joined them, "that you are a woman whom one likes better the more one sees of you."

Again Mrs. Morton laughed loudly, and said:

"You can spare us your explanations."

Montresor joined in the conversation, and she received him with marked favor. Across the room Mrs. Rae was engaged in an earnest *tête-à-tête* with a young member of Congress, who to wealth added good looks and brains much above the average. After a little while, other men interrupting them, the Congressman left Mrs. Rae and joined the group around Mrs. Morton.

"What were you talking about so earnestly?" asked that lady of him. "Come, now, confess to us all; were *you* trying your luck?"

"If you really want to know," responded he, with a shade of embarrassment, "we were discussing the surplus in the Treasury."

At the mention of this grave financial problem there was a general laugh.

"Yes," he pursued, "she was asking me to explain it to her."

"Well, it was very good of you to do it," said Mrs. Morton. "I am sure nobody takes me off into corners to explain the surplus of the Treasury. Sometimes Mr. Morton lectures me about there not being any surplus, but that is all."

"You couldn't understand it if I did," retorted the Congressman.

"Oh, I understand all about it now," said Mrs. Morton. "It is just like people putting their money in a stocking."

"Are you sure you understand about putting money in a stocking?" asked Bridgmond, glancing down at the delicate web which partially concealed by its tracery and rare embroidery the shapely foot and ankle she displayed—Bridgmond detested what he called unwashable stockings.

Mrs. Morton responded with a laugh.

"Yes, I do, and never lose it, either."

So in the intervals of music and recitation the talk ran on; but, as Mrs. Morton addressed herself more and more frequently to Montresor, the others drew away, and they were soon left to themselves.

"It is not often, Mr. Montresor, that I have this honor," said she. "How does it happen? Is it because you think it bad form to be with Kate now, after you have taken her in to dinner?"

"Is that the only possible theory?" Montresor asked, with Socratic strategy. "May I not remind you that a man's companion at dinner is what the gods, and his hostess, wish, while the one after dinner is what he himself wishes?"

"And you chose Miss Thompson," Mrs. Morton

retorted, with that eager look which Montresor disliked, because he always felt it would seem harsh not to respond to it. Soft-hearted men, more than skin-flints, are irritated by beggars.

"Our companionship was brief, and only a means to an end," he responded, appeasing his conscience for this false coin by reflecting that Miss Thompson had made use of him to join Mrs. Morton's group.

"Is that a compliment—to call me an end?" Her laugh was faltering, and her expression had an indefinable solicitude.

"Is it not what all men come to who seek the greatest happiness?" Montresor's mood was psychologically propitious for the appeal which had been made to the instinctive sympathy of the sexes, and his voice in this response unwittingly had more of a masculine stress than he had meant it should. Still, there was no very explicit avowal involved in this speech; yet Mrs. Morton blushed, then paled, and finally, in a voice almost of entreaty, said:

"Why can you never be sincere with me?"

He returned, with dogged, cautious flippancy:

"Do you think you treat me fairly? You make up your mind to class me as insincere, and when I speak out in the simplicity of my heart, you say, 'How can an insincere man speak sincerely? Therefore, what he says must be a lie, and the fact that it has the appearance of truth only shows how vicious he is. Let no such man be trusted.' "

Nevertheless, Mrs. Morton was persistent.

"Do you think," said she, "your manner has been such as to give 'the appearance of truth' to what you said—or rather to what you implied? You have

been in Washington two months, and I have not had a real chat with you more than half a dozen times."

But Montresor was equally resolute, so he still replied with implications.

"Oh, you count only the times I have been with you, and not the times I have wished to be with you. I suppose it is because I am not, like you, an esoteric Buddhist. Besides, to get at you whenever we meet, I must always climb over a wall of men, three deep, which seems so undignified and has a look of eagerness which, to be justified, requires a warmer reception than you ever accord me."

Ordinarily, Mrs. Morton's touchy egotism would have been on the alert to resent the phrase "counted the times"—all the more as it was a fact, and one which her own speech had affirmed; but now she seemed unable to summon the courage for any combative retort. With an indulgent smile, therefore, she replied:

"What nonsense you are uttering! You know you could 'get at me' if you tried. You manage to see enough of Kate Rae—in fact, I'll bet, or, as you would say, 'wager,' she was off walking with you when I called there this afternoon and found her gone out, although she had an appointment with me."

The feeling of jealousy which prompted this latter remark put Mrs. Morton in tune to perceive, by passion's penetrating induction, that for some reason Montresor was stung by the fact of Mrs. Rae's absence from home. So, when he suggested she had, perhaps, called too early, the same instinct told her to score still better by clinching that point. Therefore she hastened to say:

"Not at all; it was nearly six—a time when all respectable women ought to be at home, anyhow."

"You forget," said Montresor, who had little heart for joking, but felt he must say something, "that you yourself were out at that hour."

"Oh, I don't call myself respectable," she said, laughing heartily; "but Kate does—prides herself upon it—holds it as a club over the rest of us. After all, though, she does whatever she likes herself."

In point of fact, when Mrs. Morton called on her cousin it was only ten minutes after five; and, although, as a rule, the Recording Angel makes no note of feminine misstatements of time, it is to be hoped that this particular lie was writ large and underscored, for it was said with malignant intent, and had an unhappy effect entirely disproportioned to its real value.

For Montresor was cut to the quick by this seeming proof that Mrs. Rae had deceived him—and about a rendezvous with a man like Robinson! He was in no condition to think of any one of several natural explanations, which otherwise would have occurred to him; and circumstances now conspired with Mrs. Morton's crude sarcasm to make the woman he had so idealized appear that which of all things he most detested—a hypocrite.

The wife of a captain in the navy had just finished playing, in brilliant fashion, a Hungarian rhapsody by Liszt, and, at the request of Mrs. Rae, who was seated near her, had glided off into what she called "Kate's Air." It had been caught from some festival in a great Italian church, and probably belonged to that large class of music so jealously guarded and never published; at any rate, either by

reason of its lack of correctness in being played by ear, or else because of its rarity, no one had been able to recognize it or give it a name.

It was as sweet and pure as an angel's voice, and flowed with the low, rhythmic murmur of a sunlit brook through banks of lilies. Coming after the mad, sensual music of Liszt, it was in such strong contrast that even the very young and the very old—always the last to repress their chatter—were hushed into unwonted silence. Katherine, paler than usual, had turned her face toward the piano; and as Montresor looked upon her statuesque profile, with the eager droop of her slender, graceful neck, and the intense, far-away gaze of her luminous, deeply shaded eyes, she seemed to him a divine expression of all that was pure and truthful. Yet within the hour she had told him a pitiful falsehood.

It is one of the absurd characteristics of passion that it ignores every point of view except its own—or rather its own of that particular instant—and lovers demand a sort of clairvoyance whereby their own knowledge and thoughts are sedulously followed by their mistresses. Montresor felt, therefore, that Mrs. Rae was deliberately trifling with and insulting him by her pose of innocence—as if she were saying: "Oh, yes, I lied to you, and I was walking with a low cad; but look at me and you will forget it all." With the same preposterous egotism he felt that she was conscious of his revolt and defiance; whereupon he abandoned his caution with Mrs. Morton and showed her a deferential interest which not only charmed her, but, for the time being, raised their intercourse to a higher level, making her seem more worthy of his regard.



## CHAPTER IX

### A CALL UPON MRS. RAE

As may be divined, Montresor did not succeed the next day in dismissing Mrs. Rae from his thoughts; and, finally concluding she might be able to explain, waited impatiently for five o'clock to arrive. As he approached the door he forced himself, with some difficulty, into the feelings of a virtuous and implacable judge, instead of a guilty, disloyal culprit seeking pardon.

Entering the drawing-room, he found it impossible to perform immediately either in one rôle or the other, as there were several people present, including Singleton, who had been freed earlier than usual by an adjournment of the House—in memory of one of those Representatives of whose existence they had scarcely been conscious until his death was announced. He soon found himself, therefore, in deep and earnest colloquy with the brother, and a little apart from the others. Having no official capacity, he was enabled to discuss with this important member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs a subject upon which he would otherwise have been compelled to preserve discreet silence.

At that time what were known as “the dynamite outrages” were causing English and American statesmen to consider changes in the extradition laws

that would separate brutal attacks upon humanity from the protection given, in the past, to political agitation. The House of Representatives could have no voice upon this subject, since the Senate only would pass upon any necessary treaty; but Mr. Singleton was a man of such high character and attainments that he was consulted upon all questions of great importance. Montresor was possessed of much intelligent tact, and skilfully avoided allowing the conversation to take a turn that would force Mr. Singleton to give his own opinion upon the question; but was able to make a decided impression upon him by felicitous quotations from the speeches of great American statesmen in the past, which he had been reading assiduously.

In the midst of the conversation he saw Mrs. Rae glancing at him, and there was in her eyes an indescribable blending of wistful doubt and indignation, which so unsettled him that he found some difficulty in finishing what he had to say with the requisite discretion. He, therefore, sought to face the fire as soon as a question, shot across the room by an elderly lady at Mr. Singleton, gave him an excuse for so doing. Although no one else was near, the circumstances were not ideal for a frank explanation.

After a few conventional remarks, she said:

"I am sure you and my brother were talking politics, weren't you?"

"Why do you think so?" said Montresor, defensively.

"Oh, because he looked so solemn. You know, he takes it seriously, as if it really were what the dictionary defines it—I looked it up the other day—let me see—'politics: the science of government; that

part of ethics which relates to the regulation and government of a nation or state for the preservation of its safety, peace, or prosperity.' I believe that's right. He thinks that's all true, whereas you and I know it ought to read, 'politics: the art of pretending to others that you like them, and thereby obtaining some personal advantage; hence, politic: to be cunning and deceitful.' "

Montresor was much taken aback by the asperity with which this was said, especially as her own conversation with him had so frequently turned upon political topics; and, notwithstanding the situation, he answered, somewhat at random:

"But your own sex has often interested itself in politics, from Aspasia down to Sarah Jennings and the Duchess of Devonshire."

"A nice lot you have named," Mrs. Rae retorted. "An adventuress, a termagant, and a person who was so unwomanly as not to dispute with a butcher. But I am glad to see that two-thirds of your examples are Englishwomen, and none American."

"Let me see," said Montresor, with a pause; "the only classic American example of which I can think, on the spur of the moment, is Mrs. Blennerhasset—to name more modern instances would not be history, but scandal."

"But," persisted Mrs. Rae, with a look which only half succeeded in appearing one of idle banter, "am I right? Were you talking politics?"

"Yes," replied Montresor; "your brother's—the dictionary kind of politics."

Instead of being pleased at having her guess proved correct, a distinct shade of disappointment

passed over Katherine's face; and she said, in a voice touched with tremulous bitterness:

"You Englishmen think of nothing else; from your cradle your only dream is to control the world, and human beings are so many bricks out of which you build your big, pretentious house which you call empire. I believe you only care for sport because it hardens you and enables you, as you express it, 'to go anywhere and do anything.'"

Montresor was still more at a loss to understand this mood. Had he been able to peruse these pages he could have easily comprehended, for he would have known that Robinson, by a faint and adroitly concealed hint, had planted in Mrs. Rae's mind a suspicion that perhaps his reason for seeking her society was because she was the sister of an influential Member of Congress, whom he hoped to influence through her. Although she, in her heart of hearts, did not believe it, still there was enough semblance in the thought to give her a touch of jealous indignation, which prevented her meeting with humbleness Montresor's efforts at procuring an explanation from her. As he did not know this, he blundered on:

"Now I can understand why you don't wish to make friends with my countrymen."

"How can you so misunderstand me!" she replied, with a hard little laugh. "I am, like Hamlet, 'so poor in friends' that I wouldn't willingly part with a single one."

"Are we not," said Montresor, determined to bring the conversation to the topic he had come to discuss, "verging upon that dangerous ground which we were treading last night, when I so unintention-

ally angered you by thinking you had been walking in G Street with Mr. Robinson?"

Raising her eyebrows into a little frown, as though trying to remember, Katherine asked:

"Was I angry? How ill-bred of me! I am sure I don't know why I should have been."

"You don't deny it so indignantly to-day as you did yesterday," insisted Montresor.

"Why, you know," replied Mrs. Rae, with an indifferent drawl, "our sex is allowed to change its mind."

"Isn't that a rather euphemistic expression for the very fault which you found in politicians, especially English politicians—being deceitful?" said Montresor, with the retort discourteous.

"But, remember," returned she, imperturbably, "that where a woman's reputation is concerned, a man is expected to lie like a gentleman. Why may we not lie to protect ourselves? But it's always the way—what is a sin in a woman becomes a virtue in a man."

"Yes, I understand," said Montresor; "men are so low in the moral scale that the highest virtue of which they are capable would still be considered a sin in a woman or the angels."

Mrs. Rae would not be mollified, but continued: "I was reading the other day about a tribe of people who have severe laws against any violation of the marriage vow, but laws so one-sided that they must have been suggested by an Englishman or an American. If a husband strays from his duty they don't punish him, but his wife instead, for they say it must really be her fault."

"What a delightful country, where men have the

courage of their convictions!" exclaimed Montresor. "We English and Americans know that it is the way it ought to be, but dare not put it into law."

"You have had the courage," returned Mrs. Rae, "to allow, by law, a man to beat his wife."

"Only with a rod the size of his thumb," put in Montresor, quickly.

She: "So, the bigger the brute, the bigger the cudgel. I suppose that is why gentlemen are said to have smaller bones than the lower-born."

He: "I had always supposed that, in olden times, the knights who had small bones could carry heavier armor without tiring their horses, so, in the shock of battle, more of them survived—survival of the fittest, you know; and in modern times they stand a better chance in hunting fields—same thing. But if, as you think, gentlemen wear small bones in mercy to your sex, it is a matter for much pride on our part."

She: "Well, I shan't let this be a matter of contention between us—tell me, what have you been doing with yourself since I saw you last night?"

Katherine, who had little heart for the fencing in which she had indulged, took this, the simplest way of letting their customary friendly and intimate intercourse be resumed, if Montresor really wished it. He did wish it very much, and all would have gone well had not other visitors come over at that precise moment to take their leave. Unfortunately, in the course of conversation, one of them told Mrs. Rae that she had thought of calling the previous afternoon at five o'clock, and asked if she was in at that hour.

"Oh, yes," was the response; "I was at home the

whole afternoon, and should have been glad to see you."

This was said in such a perfectly natural and truthful manner as to completely astound Montresor, who had so short a time before understood her to admit she had been walking with Robinson. Either she was untruthful or had so little real regard for his opinion that she was willing to appear so to him. When they were left alone he asked her, with rather a high "Daniel come to judgment" manner:

"Didn't I hear you say just now that you were at home all the afternoon yesterday?"

Mrs. Rae, offended at his tone, at once resumed her own trifling tactics.

"Your hearing is wonderfully good for one of your age."

"And yet," said Montresor, hotly, "it was not five minutes ago that you confessed you had been walking with Mr. Robinson in G Street."

"What a splendid memory you have!" she replied, still flippantly. "Sometimes it is a misfortune." Then, in a voice which, in spite of her, had a strain of seriousness, she added: "I have often thought that true happiness lies in our power to forget."

He (doggedly): "But you have just told these people that you *were* at home."

She (indulgently): "When you have lived as long as I have, Mr. Montresor, you will know that certain conventional lies are permitted in society. If a person may say she is *not* at home when she really is, why may she not say she *was* at home when really she was not?"

He (triumphantly): "But why should you say *both* to me?"

She: "Perhaps I tried to double-lock the conventional door upon a topic which I wished to be private."

He (mortified, but determined): "Please tell me what is the truth."

She (with mocking lips, but earnest eye): "What is truth?" That is the question which Pilate asked so long ago—always so hard to answer. Perhaps if truth went about in the Godiva attire which the ancients represented as habitual to her, we, nowadays, should not recognize her, for we know her only by the clothes she wears. I am sure words that are true don't always tell the truth; nor do I think a character for truth was ever made, or destroyed, by mere words. So why do you ask more of me? I might utter them, but whether you would believe them or not would depend upon yourself, not upon me."

Montresor saw the last visitor rising to go, and felt that he could stay no longer, so said, hurriedly and pleadingly:

"What would you have me believe?"

"Everything I have said," she responded.

Was she mocking him? The smile upon her lips said Yes; the look in her eyes seemed to say No. Yet, with the direct contradiction in her words, how could it be otherwise? This was the riddle over which he pondered as he left the house, and for many a day thereafter.

Should he appear foolishly trivial in delaying to seek an answer, remember, he had an intense interest in the matter, which you or I could not possibly have, and, wishing a response favorable to Katherine and himself alike, feared he might not get it.



For Montresor was so much in earnest and so suddenly diffident, mentally, that he was really in doubt as to whether he had not been making a fool of himself—whether all her friendliness to him had not been imaginary. Had she so soon tired of him that she could not even wait, as with others, until he had declared his love, before showing how indifferent she was? Did she care nothing for his good opinion, being willing to appear as having lied about a secret intimacy with an intriguing cad—alternately denying and confessing, with flippant unconcern? The Professor had once compared her to a lens of ice made by Arctic explorers for starting their fire, saying that, while lighting a consuming passion in others, she herself remained cold and untouched. Montresor had thought this a mistake, and that he (fortunate man!) saw in the flushing of her cheek, the tremor of her sensitive mouth, and in the warm light coming from the depths of her eyes, a promise of such romantic, passionate love as might make a king throw his crown upon the gaming-table and recompense him for its loss. Was it his own egregious vanity which had thus led him astray and aided her in careless, almost contemptuous deception? He could not bring himself to press for an answer.

Lent came early, putting a stop to the rush of entertainments, and lessening his chances of meeting her. Then, too, ever since a certain memorable supper, when the hostess, after an absence of six months, paired her guests according to what *had* been their predilections, finding that in the meantime all had quarreled, Washington was very observant and up-to-date in assigning places. Hence, when Mrs. Rae

and Montresor did meet at dinner, they were generally at opposite ends of the table. Society, perhaps, would not have known so quickly, had not both Mrs. Morton and Robinson whispered, "There's been a row, you know." This sudden change was, of course, noticed by both Mrs. Rae and Montresor; and each being conscious of having said or done nothing to indicate a cause for it, imagined the other must have done so, and again their pride rose up in arms. As if this were not sufficient, their hostesses aggravated matters by constantly placing Montresor beside Mrs. Morton, just as they had formerly placed him beside Mrs. Rae. The latter noted, however, with a little throb of pleasure, that his manner did not indicate any increased devotion toward her cousin. On his side, Montresor felt that to have done otherwise would have been to behave no better than a boy or a cad. But was there not some other motive? Was there not something of a chivalric tenderness toward the woman who so lately had been his ideal, and of unwillingness to give her pain, no matter if she had proved false both to that ideal and to himself? On the other hand, by one of those paradoxical impulses of the human heart, he allowed a vague feeling of revenge for the wrongs he had suffered to impel him, whenever unobserved by Mrs. Rae, into an ardor toward Mrs. Morton which carried triumphant joy to the heart of the latter. Perhaps it was not so entirely a feeling of revenge against the woman as one against the virtues which she had represented to him; for, although not posing in the least as religious, and being prudish neither in her conversation nor behavior, Katherine had unquestionably ranged herself on the side of good

women, and this position had been, perhaps, somewhat exalted by Montresor's imagination.

Rasped by disappointment, he inveighed with acrid cynicism never before distempering his compliant philosophy:

"After all, life, morality, religion—the 'whole business,' as Americans say—is nothing but a game. Some pieces it is agreed shall go straight, and some crooked—if one only knows which, it is all right. Only, in future, I will take jolly good care to play as if all pieces went crooked."

Had he done this, he would have assuredly played his game badly; but he did not—he could force his tongue to utter the words, but his heart refused to believe them.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PROFESSOR IMPARTS INFORMATION

WHETHER for good or evil, Montresor's life had come to a turning-point. His Book of Engagements was no longer a Book of Fate, nor could he, by writing in it or inspection of it, direct or predict his future. If his sympathies became more restricted, they gained in force; and if, thereby, his view was narrowed, he saw more vividly. Not that his vacillating, impartial inspection of ethical matters was changed all at once; but a step had been taken in that direction.

This became evident in his study of political conditions, which, although begun with characteristic promptness immediately after his arrival in Washington, proceeded now with a stimulated, aggressive energy and quickness of apprehension, which was a decided gain, though circumstances eventually conspired again to make this phase of his duties secondary to his personal feelings.

This political investigation had in no sense a trace of detective work, for Montresor would have been unwilling to learn the secrets of those whom he was meeting in the confidence of social relations; nor was there any wish on the part of his cousin to have him do so. He sought only what might be called an appreciative contact with leaders of thought in

the capital—not merely the officials or Members of Congress, but also that large body of men successful in business, politics, science, or literature, who, with the retired veterans of the army and navy, were rapidly forming a permanent class, which must reflect, if it did not influence, the opinions and sentiments of the whole nation. Specifically, he was to judge how far Americans were affected upon the Irish question by any irritation which such disputes as the Alaskan boundary or the Newfoundland fisheries might cause, and if there was among the wealthier classes, not of Irish blood, any sentiment strong enough to induce financial support for the aggressive form just then taken by the Irish movement.

In trusting a man without previous diplomatic experience to form a correct judgment upon matters so weighty, it may appear that Montresor's cousin was doing a rash thing. But he knew his man, that he was possessed of a keen intellect, and that a life of sport and society had not prevented him from following all important public questions, which he regarded as a part of the necessary curriculum of education in any member of a family which for more than two centuries had taken an active part in the political life of England. As for his inexperience, this was not a case for diplomatic indirectness; and, as intimated in the beginning of this biography, his cousin relied upon the American atmosphere to cure him of his debilitating impartiality, which might prevent him from reaching any practical conclusion.

With much shrewdness, Montresor did not limit to politicians his efforts toward obtaining an understanding of political matters; and he found Professor Donnelly exceptionally well posted and intelligent, be-

sides being a charming companion—one who, at the outset, attracted him more than any man he had ever met. The Professor had a clear gray eye that was warm and loving—a combination I have never seen but in that one instance, and which was typical of his character. He was exact and scholarly in his science, able in general knowledge, and had, at the age of thirty-seven, an almost boyish vehemence in his likes and dislikes.

The two men were in the habit of taking long walks together in the environs of Washington, and upon one of these occasions the conversation turned to the manner in which national politics were constantly tangled with threads of local and personal interests, binding public men, more or less legitimately, to their constituencies or friends. Such was the instance of Elton, whose unquestioned influence would have been most useful in expediting the consideration of any of those matters we have mentioned as being the subject of discussion between Great Britain and the United States. But he seemed much too busy to give them any attention just then, and occupied himself assiduously in urging a "Bill to Perfect Title," and another connected with certain improvements to be made by the Government in the suburbs of Washington.

Montresor mentioned this fact one day to the Professor, as they were starting for one of their walks, and the latter laughingly replied:

"Oh, that's easy. Why don't you give me something hard? Thompson has formed a syndicate and bought up all the land where those improvements would be made; and while, perhaps, Elton may not now be a member of that syndicate, I shouldn't be

surprised if, eventually, he did become one. Even if he didn't, Thompson has put him into the way of several good things in stocks; and so, in common gratitude, he owes him a little thing like that. Then, too, some of the others in the syndicate are from Elton's State; so there you are again. This sort of bill you call private in England, and the leaders in the House of Parliament wouldn't have to bother themselves about them; but over here it is different, for with us one man is as good as another, you know, and, therefore, one bill is as good as another."

It was one of those bright, sunny days—a reminiscence of autumn or a promise of spring—which are so often interjected into a Washington winter; and as, on their way to the country, they passed along Connecticut Avenue, they encountered a great number of people of both sexes and all degrees taking the air in the fashion which best suited them.

Not to mention the pedestrians whose costumes ranged from smart silk hats and frock coats, with Parisian gowns, down to slouch hats, white ties and jackets, arm in arm with sad, home-made dresses, there was a constant variety in those who drove or rode past. There were smart broughams and victorias, while from these the list of wheeled vehicles ran through a kaleidoscopic range not to be seen in any other city in the world. Old Virginia carriages, that had been built in the beginning of the century, rolled creaking along, drawn by well-bred horses with rough coats and long tails in hopeless tangle, driven with slack reins by negro coachmen, who stared in every direction but the one in which they were going. They caused many a strange oath as they pursued the even tenor of their way, regardless

of the laws of the road, much less its courtesies. Speeding by would come a sporty tradesman in a light wagon shiny with the fresh varnish of recent purchase. Then a spectacled female Treasury clerk, riding a tricycle, would make a big coach turn out of her path, despite the arrogantly warning blare of its horn.

An army officer, the hero of a score of battles, and his wife, the heroine of as many children, crowded with a portion of their flock into a two-wheeled her-dick, bow meekly to a former peddler, none other than Thompson himself, rolling by in his superbly turned-out equipage. Cabmen, with such battered hats as are otherwise only seen upon inebriates in the play, chat familiarly from the boxes of huge, open landaus to country bridal couples within, dressed in vivid trousers and gowns, who are seasoning their honeymoon with sights of the capital.

In every description of vehicle the Professor found acquaintances, with whom he exchanged tokens of friendly recognition. The woman of fashion greeted him with a familiar nod; the old lady from Virginia with a prim bow and something of affection in her smile; the tradesman with lifted hat and admiring greeting in his eye; the female clerk with a gleam from her eye-glasses; the driver of the four-in-hand with a whip salute, as he caught up a double-thong; the army officer, his wife and progeny with waving hands, grins and shouts—each and all managed to convey to the Professor a cordial greeting beyond the convention of passing signals. I have omitted the ex-peddler, Thompson—so did the Professor. Montresor noticed that he neglected to catch Thomp-



son's eye, and, having a little curiosity as to the cause of the dislike, introduced the topic by saying:

"Do you know where Thompson came from? I have heard several stories, no two alike."

The reply came in a dry, hard voice, not at all habitual:

"You want to know where he came from? Well, he went to New York, from Colorado; but, before that, I believe he came straight from hell."

"Is that one of the States?" Montresor asked, bantering.

"If I were a newspaper funny man," responded the other, "I should say that it was—a state of perdition; but, in point of fact, it is not one of the United States, but a British colony, too well content with, and too dependent upon, the mother-country to think of revolution."

"Well," consented Montresor, anxious to return to the topic, "since he has been a fellow-countryman of mine, tell me what you know about him."

"I'll stick to the absolute facts—which is a poor way of telling a story—and you can draw your own conclusions. After he had made a good bit of money in the peddling business he came to the town near the Jumping Jack Mine, of which I had charge, and started one of those general "stores" where they sell everything from a Bible to green rum. He had a brother, Jim, a generous, impulsive, good-looking fellow, always ready to do a favor, but shy about asking for one, and consequently not much of a money-getter—William, as I have told you, was a money-getter.

"After a while Jim fell in love, and unfortunately the girl was rich; so he would not think of offering

himself until he had made a fortune. His hopes seemed to depend upon an interest in a mine which, some time before, he had, out of pure good nature, bought from a man anxious to go East. The boys out there called it, in derision, "The See-Saw," because of its fluctuating production. When Jim bought it, it was barely earning expenses, and his friends jokingly told him its name ought to be changed to 'Mine-Us.' For several years Jim worked early and late studying books on metallurgy, writing and interviewing people, in the hope of having it developed. After a while William Thompson got hold of a majority of the stock, and soon made himself president, with a salary, and put the company into debt to his store for large purchases. Then he told his brother he would pay him what he had given for his stock, with interest at ten per cent., or else he (Jim) could buy him out—and, of course, pay the debt of the company to the store—but he was determined either to own the mine entirely or not at all. He set a day and hour one month ahead, when the thing must be closed one way or another.

"But," interposed Montresor, "I should have thought that when Jim's friends heard of the game that was being played upon him by his own brother they would have tried to help him out."

"I don't know," continued the Professor, "whether he told any one, at the time, of the exact situation. I did not hear of it until long afterward. All we knew at the time was that Jim was attempting to raise the money. The day came, and just before the hour when the transfer was to be made the two brothers were both in the post-office, which was also the telegraph office. I was writing a message which I

wished to send, and, as I understood the signals, unconsciously listened to a telegram being ticked off, but had not caught the address. It said:

“ ‘Will give you, if you close at once, two hundred thousand for your stock.’

“I remembered afterward that William Thompson was standing near, reading a newspaper, and I noticed how pale his usually red face seemed. By the time I had finished sending my telegram both the Thompsons had left. The operator copied the message he had been receiving and handed it to me, saying: ‘Professor, here’s a telegram Jim Thompson ought to get right away, and, as you pass by his house, I thought you might sign for it and take it to him.’

“As I knew what good news it contained, I was only too glad; and, learning that Jim had gone to a lawyer’s office, I hurried there, and saw him, with a sad, hopeless face, rising from a table, where he had evidently just signed a paper. When I thrust the telegram into his hand, he opened it mechanically and read it. Not a muscle quivered. His hand was as firm as marble, and yet I saw at a glance I had given him a mortal wound. His voice, however, was quite husky as he handed the telegram to his brother and said: ‘Will, you are in luck.’ What do you think that dog replied? ‘Well, Jim, if you want to back out, we’ll call it off.’ He knew there was no need of the sneer with which he said this. Jim pointed to his signature and answered, contemptuously: ‘Did you ever see my name underneath a lie, or did you ever see me take money, as a gift, from any man? It’s your property one minute after I sign, just as much as a year.’ Then he turned and

walked out, as one who moved from sheer force of will."

"What a beast!" ejaculated Montresor, not exactly consecutive in his comment; "but go on."

"There is not much more to it," said the Professor. "Afterward I was explaining to Jim that I had been so eager to give the good news, having overheard it as it was being received, and I happened to mention that William was standing near me—well, he didn't control himself so perfectly this time. He turned ashy pale, and, leaning on a table, he said, in a wistful sort of voice: 'But, Professor, Will wasn't near enough to hear the telegraph instrument, was he?' I told him that Will was nearer to the instrument than I was; and the moment I did so I realized what a fool I had been, and that, while he could excuse his brother for driving a hard bargain or want of generosity, this piece of downright treachery broke him all up. Of course, I guessed that William understood the telegraph code. Jim pulled himself together, and said that William could not have understood the message as I did, or the trade would have been called off before it was too late."

By this time they were passing the house which Thompson had rented for the season, a superb structure of white marble, in the style of the French Renaissance. A cab full of tourists had stopped in front of it, and the negro coachman pointed it out, giving, in a loud voice, desultory bits of information regarding its owner, and also its present occupant. As they passed he was saying:

"Colonel Millionaire Thompson is livin' in it dis winter, and people tells me he is so rich he kin buy and sell any ob dese Washington rich folks."

The Professor gave a chuckle, and said to Montresor:

"This darky evidently has lately come from the South, and he thinks 'Millionaire' is a family name, having heard it said, 'He is a millionaire,' just as they would say in the South, 'He is a Lee or a Hampton.' After all, that isn't as bad as a report in a New York newspaper of prominent departures for Europe which, after several people of title, mentioned 'Millionaire Yates, of Chicago.' We must have some titles, and, as you called your successful robbers barons, we call ours millionaires."

Montresor looked back at the building, which they had now left behind, and said: "Your robber has a big, fine castle to live in."

"Not so big," answered the Professor, "as the one his brother Jim lives in, for the insane asylum at Morristown is one of the finest in the world!"

"You don't say so! What a shame! Have such men souls, I wonder?" exclaimed the Englishman, again incoherently, but intelligibly to the Professor, who answered:

"William Thompson thinks he has a soul, and he is now trying to tinker it up. As for his children, he has guarded theirs with a perfect antiseptic treatment which ought to have exterminated all germs of evil. But the seeds of pride and vainglory in their blood are so hardy that I fear nothing but the fires of purgatory can sterilize them."

The Professor had a way of indulging in monologues, under the impression that he was carrying on a conversation; and he now launched out, quite unconscious of his companion's rights. The latter, however, was content to preserve a comparative si-

lence, from the fact that, although having a good stride and being by no means unsound in his wind, he could not keep pace with the Professor ascending a steep hill and make long speeches in reply. But many worse arguments have prevailed by the might of long-windedness.

"As for me," continued Donelly, "I also regard men like Thompson as formidable arguments against the existence of a soul—at any rate, a soul with moral attributes. But, for the matter of that, when did you ever see any real evidence of a soul? Take a gentle, good woman, tap her skull with a stick, give her a drug, or let her have a fever, and she will murder her own child. No! Whenever the mind fails, there is nothing left to help matters, as far as I can see—certainly nothing better than what the brutes have. 'Lo, the poor Indian, thinks, admitted to that equal sky, his faithful dog will bear him company'; but the poor Indian is mistaken. If the treacherous, ungrateful, cruel beast, man, is allowed to enter the same sky as dogs and horses, there is no such thing as Omniscient Justice."

At this point the Professor, in making an extra whack at the dead stalk of a tall weed, no doubt because it had grown up as a man, paused long enough for Montresor to ask, as he caught his breath:

"How do you account for our moral instinct?"

"We haven't got it. If we had, we should find just as many good people in the city slums as out of them, and suicide and polygamy wouldn't be virtues in Asia and crimes in Europe and America."

"And yet," puffed Montresor, more from a sense of opposition to a man who walked so unreasonably

fast than from conviction, "there *is* such a thing as morality."

"What we *call* morality," replied the Professor, still in his ex-cathedra style, "is simply a set of rules which mankind has found advantageous, when dwelling in permanent communities. Take the Ten Commandments, for instance: the first four are ceremonial; then the fifth and seventh command respect for parents and spouses, so as to preserve the family; the others are all to protect life and property, which has the last word, and is so sacred that you not only mustn't take it, but you mustn't even *want* to take it—and *that* is your morality."

"Then," said Montresor, "the only thing which prevents your knocking me on the head—you have already knocked the wind out of me—and taking my purse is the fact that a batch of atoms agreed to meet in your person, form themselves into what we call an impulse of honor, and so prevent your stealing."

"That," said the Professor, with a smile, "and the fact that you are a younger son and have nothing worth stealing." Then, stopping, he turned and placed his hand on Montresor's shoulder, saying, more seriously: "No, my boy. Don't misunderstand me. I am not trying to explain how abstract virtues can come from concrete forces; my little hatchet is made to cut trees down, not to plant them; trying to trace the simplest thought back to its atomic source is enough to drive any man crazy. It's like the Indian cutting off one end of his blanket and putting it on the other end to make it longer. It's our hypocrisy I'm railing against. In nature you don't find comets pretending to be suns."

This word "hypocrisy" was of evil sound to Montresor, whose mind so incessantly dwelt upon the suspicion that he had found such a trait in Mrs. Rae. Of course, the enormity of that sin would consist more in having deceived *him* than in the abstract sin of deception. Nor was this feeling one of mere egoism. For does not the criminality of deception vary peculiarly with the circumstances? Putting aside all question of extenuation or of deceiving for a good, instead of an evil, purpose, is not the deception between parent and child, husband and wife, or lover and mistress, much worse than between strangers? And that practiced upon him had not been forced upon Mrs. Rae—it was with gratuitous malice; for no good object—solely for the benefit of Robinson; and it was made possible, as she must know, only because he cared for her. This blind probing of his raw wound inflamed his argumentative opposition; so he retorted, somewhat sharply:

"And yet comets have been mistaken for suns."

"That was our fault, not theirs," said the Professor. "They have been mistaken for other things besides suns—generally for a devilish monster sent to destroy the world. Pope Calixtus took that view of Halley's comet and issued a bull against it. When it did not immediately disappear, one-half of the world laughed; and when it finally did go, the other half believed in His Holiness all the more firmly. Meanwhile the earth and planets had made no mistake, did not start from their orbits, and paid no sort of attention to this wandering wraith, knowing it was as harmless as that of Hamlet's father, governed by laws more inexorable, and regulated, as



to its exit, by much more infallible timepieces than crowing cocks or stage managers.

"Speaking of timepieces, we get a rather nice view of the Observatory from here."

"It was only because man has an additional sense to be deceived," said Montresor, persistently, and ignoring the change of subject. "With us seeing is believing—sometimes."

"What I mean," continued the Professor, "is that in nature shams have no effect, whereas with us they do. Take this magnificent road that Elton wishes to have built across that valley. They say that hell is paved with good intentions—so this road will be, only they will be sham good intentions. The whole gang will tell you it is only to benefit the public—that the city people may get out into the country, and the country people come into the city—that the superb viaduct across this valley will be an object-lesson to all the nation in engineering and art. Whereas, we know that, if it depended upon those motives, it would never be done. Elton is working at it for pay in politics or in money, or both. Thompson, who doesn't know a Greek root from a carrot, pretends to be interested in establishing a national university out here, when really he expects, as a result of these improvements, to be able to sell land for three dollars a foot, which, by buying up mortgages and foreclosing, the Celestial Heights Improvement Company got for a cent a foot. Your friend Father Vincent hopes to have a Catholic university built in the neighborhood, and is working like a slave, under that clever scamp Robinson, to get all the Members of Congress who are Catholics, or have

strong Irish constituencies, to vote for that bill—and others which are being log-rolled with it. And so sordid a view do they take of human nature—and, remember, their success comes from a knowledge of human nature—that they count upon Singleton, one of the straightest men I know, to favor their bill in the House—not because of all their public benefit rot, but because they had the shrewdness *not* to buy up a piece of land out here which Mrs. Rae is interested in.”

These last words gave new distress to Montresor. Was this the miserable venal tie between her and Robinson? Did she, for money, the most abject of all bribes, make obscure rendezvous with him and lie to a friend? Even a mad infatuation for the man, cad though he was, would have been less ignoble and more forgivable. But here she had sold herself into a greedy, selfish gang, with the members of which she, in public, avoided all signs of intimacy, so that she might the more freely carry out their designs upon her brother. Perhaps, too, she was working Robinson's will in other things; and the evident dissatisfaction she had shown when she found that Singleton and himself had been talking politics was occasioned by fear that her purposes might be interfered with. And Father Vincent, who had seemed such a gentleman-priest, swallowed his dislike for Robinson and, kilting his hallowed cassock, was trotting about as a whipper-in for an adroit rogue. What tawdry, tragico-comical plotters they seemed! So, with hot bitterness, he replied:

“Why should we bother about a little thing like that? It's only part of life's game.

'All the world's a game,  
And all the men and women on it merely gamblers.  
They have their cut-ins and their cut-outs.'

If your adversary sinks a card at piquet, finesses in whist, or makes a bluff in poker, you don't cry out when you lose; why should you, in the bigger game, when you come to grief from a fake play? The only thing is to know who are your partners, and not get 'lost in the shuffle,' as your slang goes. Deception is a necessary part of a politician's or a parson's business, and we know it; why yowl, then, when we find them doing it? As for woman——" here he paused for the fraction of a second. The words which his brain formed were: "Since the days of Jael, Judith, and Delilah she has gloried in deceit." When, however, he felt that it was of Katherine he was speaking, he could not utter them, but, instead, continued: "In the majority of cases, where she plays the game falsely, it is from ignorance or because she gets the wrong tip from some man. Is the game worth the candle to any of us? That is the only question."

There was something to suggest unusual emotion in the very repression of Montresor's voice, which, as he continued, tried to modulate itself into a purely indifferent cynicism.

Donelly, who blended the clear, intellectual vision of a man with much of a woman's intuitive perceptiveness, was quick to realize that the discussion had lost its academic character, and that, for some reason, Montresor felt peculiarly at odds with life. Nor was it difficult to imagine that the mention of Mrs. Rae's name in connection with a lobbying land spec-

ulation had more to do with this access of pessimism than the intrinsic merits of the Professor's own discourse. He gazed at Montresor with a compassionate, protecting look, which seemed absurd in a man whose fashionably cut tweed suit, lithe, active figure, and clean-shaven, alert face gave no suggestion of his seven years' seniority—in themselves, after all, of no great matter. The younger man, indeed, had seen as much—perhaps more—of the world, but had never, like the Professor, been confronted with any serious crisis in his life; nor had he ever been in practical command of a large and heterogeneous community of people, which latter ordeal, more than any other, quickly develops the quality of a man.

Despite the regret which he felt at the pain he had given, Donelly did not make matters worse by an instant attempt at retracting or patching up the offending allusion. Although, like the bronchos of the West, he was, at times, given to express the vital force within him by a sudden dashing gallop, like them, he was sure-footed, and did not stumble into difficulties. He had merely intended to illustrate Thompson and his associates' low point of view when he alluded to their expectation that Singleton's political action would be influenced by Mrs. Rae's pecuniary interest in the measures they were exploiting. Answering Montresor's concluding question, "Is the game worth the candle?" he said, in a frank, earnest voice:

"Yes! tons of them—worth even more expensive lighting than any at Morrissey's or Monte Carlo. Only, to change the old adage a bit, 'Those that play with the devil must have a long suit'—and stick to it.

In your game of life, as in whist, any sort of system consistently followed is better than a mere Bumble-puppyish, blind playing to the trick that is on the table. The man who has fixed principles, and fights for them, whether he calls himself Stoic or Christian, knight-errant or patriot, is, on the average, likely to have a successful life and a happy one."

"Why don't you allow a few minutes to elapse before you contradict yourself?" interrupted Montresor. "You have just been tearing your hair and gnashing your teeth with rage because unprincipled rogues like Thompson and Robinson are successful."

"I was raging," returned the other, "because they should *ever* be successful, not because they are generally so. No doubt, though, it is inevitable. Perhaps in that more ethereal part of nature, which we call the psychological, the law of action and reaction is just as immutable as in the more palpable division which we call material; and no Right thing can exist without its corresponding Wrong. When you think of it, could there be Courage without Cowardice, Honor without Treachery, Truth without Hypocrisy? Q. E. D. If all the world were altruists, wouldn't we arrive at the same deadlock as if we were all self-seekers? Imagine if, instead of Thompson being interested in pampering himself, the whole rest of the world were doing it for him! The last state of the man would be worst than the first! No, old fellow! If I said there was no scientific evidence of a thing called a soul which directed our moral nature, I did not say that some great Law—perhaps as simple as the dynamics of opposing forces—had not produced in the psychological world forms of

symmetrical strength and beauty as perfect as those in the material world."

From the hill upon which they stood they commanded a view of the entire city, and for miles beyond in every direction. Far away to the left arose, high above the city, the huge dome of the Capitol, seeming like that of its great Roman compeer, St. Peter's, exalted in pride of power over its surroundings. Then, with the silvery waters of the Potomac glimmering ever in the background, the eye ranged along the scene, where, emerging from the russet of thousands of leafless trees, might be discerned the roof-lines of the city, commencing with the mansards of the business district, their ugliness softened by greater remoteness, passed the immediate, and therefore more pronounced, suggestion of the Greek pediments of the Treasury and White House, and finally lost itself amid the dense groves and gray stones of Georgetown College. But from the center, and making all else seem trivial, there towered aloft against the gray-blue sky the slender, snow-white symmetry of the Washington Monument—the Matterhorn transfigured into an alabastrine obelisk. It did not overpower, for there could be no thought of contest against it; dominating, without domineering, it stood, with unruffled serenity, in unconscious matchless supremacy. Pointing to this, the Professor continued:

"Look at that! There could not be a better illustration of difference in point of view. My wife will tell you it is pointing to heaven; Bob Ingersoll will say it is pointing to the center of the earth; to me it is simply a great, white signal that, no matter how I wander, will always give me my bearings. It is

more than a monument; it is a symbol of Character. Any figure upon it—even that of Washington—would have been an anti-climax, and, although they accuse us Americans of having no artistic sense, we have not even scribbled inscriptions upon it, as they would have done in Egypt or France. And you and I may wander into pessimism; but we know that if there was a man like Benedict Arnold, there was also one like Washington, and if there is Thompson, there is also Singleton.”

“But I thought,” said Montresor, interrupting, “you said that these syndicate fellows, who were such judges of human character, counted upon his personal interest in the adjoining property to secure his support for their bills.”

“So I did,” continued the other; “and with the average politician they would be right. But Singleton is above the average; and he can no more be bought, directly or indirectly, than—than his sister. I can’t think of a stronger expression than that.”

To Montresor these last words brought the same sudden and blessed sense of relief which comes when a surgeon, after washing a wound with some biting antiseptic, applies a soft and gentle salve which covers and soothes the stinging pain of the exposed nerves. It was not that they convinced him of the error of his own suspicions, for he was impressed by several concordant facts of which the Professor knew nothing. But, imperceptibly, his feeling for Katherine had taken such a deep hold upon him that she had become a part—a most precious and sensitive part—of himself; so, whatever doubts he might have, it was an added and piquant distress that others should think ill of her. It gave him great



“ It is more than a monument ; it is a symbol of character ”



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content, therefore, to hear such praise from one equally in touch with every branch of society—the intellectual, the smart, the unsmart, and also that greater, deeper, truer world which ignores social divisions.

In a much more natural tone of banter, he said :

"You started out, Donelly, by denying souls, and now you have ended by giving them back under another name—at any rate, to persons like Washington—and yourself, I suppose. Won't you let me in, if I'm good?"

"No," retorted the Professor, "I do not give it that or any other ~~name~~; whereas the parson takes a part of that Right Impulse and that Wrong Impulse, which undoubtedly exist, stamps his own superscription upon it, calls it a Soul, and then proceeds to lay it as a stake in his little gamble with the devil. Straightness is a much more human goodness than its moral-sounding synonym, 'Rectitude.' Money-getting in a layman they call Avarice, and in the priest Zeal. They have got into such a state that they believe there would be no goodness but for a collocation of words which they have defined, just as some philosophers maintain there can be no abstract thinking without words."

"Well, old man," responded Montresor, "if you go on much longer, there will be no such thing as goodness or abstract thinking, for there will be no words left; you will have worked them to death, and English will be a dead language."

"Oh, this is nothing," laughed the Professor. "You should come over to Baltimore with me some day, when I lecture at Johns Hopkins University and grow eloquent for an hour and one minute on

the crystallization of iron. But here's something that will amuse you more," and, stooping, he picked up a flint arrow-head. "Send this to England and tell them in what danger you have been from an American savage, within half an hour's walk of the White House—or the Metropolitan Club—whichever you regard as our national center."

"The club, of course," responded Montresor; "for you mathematicians say the greater includes the less, and the President is a member of the club. But I cannot understand how you find those things every time we walk, while I never do. I believe you plant them. And this one, as you say, isn't three miles from the head of your Government. It's as if I could walk out any day from my rooms in Jermyn Street and pick up, in Fulham, for instance, fragments of the wheel from Queen Boadicea's war-chariot."

Although the real effect of the Professor's philippics against religious dogmas and Thompson's scheme tended toward confusion and depression, the immediate result of his praise of Mrs. Rae was to cause a feeling almost of elation, in Montresor's innate loyalty. To one who is in deep pain the slightest relief is something akin to pleasure. The height of one's happiness depends upon the plane from which it is measured.

As they were parting upon the steps of the club, Montresor said:

"I must go to my rooms now, Professor, and write out my notes of your lecture upon the soul. As I understand it, you say, to paraphrase our Cockneys: 'Give it a nayme and I'll tell you what it isn't.' Doesn't that represent your views?"

The Professor gave a little laugh, in which there was a shade of constraint, and answered:

"That seems a conservative statement. Or—you might say I do not like to have mysteries of vital consequence 'called names' by glib dogmatists."

Although it appeared on the surface only a flip-pant echo of his own speech, Montresor, as he turned away in the gathering darkness, felt, in some way, that it was the serious protest of an earnest thinker.

## CHAPTER XI

### A SUSPICIOUS BILL

As has been said before, Montresor, although of a somewhat morbidly imaginative temperament, had a saving grace of practical sense, which asserted itself when the occasion required. After indulging in resentful mental tirades against Katherine stooping to be Robinson's accomplice, he ended by planning methodically to prevent (if he could) her being entangled in any scheme of doubtful character. His reason told him that the first step would be to obtain some position in which he would be entitled to a hearing from the syndicate managers, and it occurred to him he might do so by acquiring any piece of property, however small, in the region under consideration. He set about this the next day, eliciting, in the course of his inquiries, important information as to the general plans of the syndicate, and, incidentally, of Katherine's possible interest in the scheme.

He found that, of the two bills which were being pushed by the syndicate and its friends, the one to "Perfect Titles in the District of Columbia" had precedence on the calendar of the House. This provided that where legal records had been destroyed, and the original papers, of which they were a record, could

not be obtained, copies might be substituted; and where these latter could not be actually deposited with the clerk, *copies of the certified copies might be recorded*. This last provision was brought in parenthetically, in the midst of a long and intricate repetition, in legal phraseology, and would escape the notice of an ordinary reader—such as that of the average Member of Congress, accustomed to glance over a dozen bills a day, none of which might ever be voted upon. Montresor himself would probably have paid no attention to it, had not his eye rested mechanically upon that sentence while he was trying to straighten in his mind the meaning of what had preceded it. It, however, struck him at once that it would be a convenient arrangement for any one who wished to use a forged certified copy; for, by going to some out-of-the-way place, he could have a copy attested before a notary, and the forgery itself would probably never be inspected by any one especially interested in discovering the fraud. He was reading the bill in the office of a real estate agent, and it was, therefore, easy for him, by inquiring into the titles of land in that vicinity, to learn which particular parcels would be affected by the proposed “perfecting of title.” There were only two—one being held by the syndicate, and the other by a woman named Weeks, who had *mortgaged it to Katherine Rae*; and, the limit of the mortgage having expired, it could be foreclosed at any time. They were both small pieces of land, which made Montresor ask the agent if the adverse titles could be bought, and at what price.

“Oh, they don’t really amount to much,” was the reply. “I’ve no doubt, especially since this bill about

title has been introduced, that quit-claims could be bought for each of them at about three thousand dollars. I'll write and find out for you, if you wish. It seems strange the syndicate don't buy up, instead of bothering with this bill; but I hear Thompson takes care of the pennies now, just as much as he did when he had a small shop, somewhere out West. That's the reason he is a millionaire, I suppose, and why I'm not; but, then, I get more fun out of the pennies than he does—a fifteen-cent cigar and ten cents' worth of beer, for instance."

After giving the agent the order to inquire about the price of the quit-claims, Montresor left the office. The affair seemed to grow worse with each new development: here he had the prospective spectacle of Mrs. Rae foreclosing a mortgage upon a poor woman, and, after influencing her brother in favor of a law to cover up possible fraud, she was to realize a profit of—how much? A commonplace, bourgeois seven thousand dollars was what might be expected; doubtless a great sum to poor Mrs. Weeks, but for a woman well born, beautiful, in the first social ranks, and with all the comforts and most of the luxuries of life, to sell herself for such a price was inexpressibly, pitiably shabby.

It was grotesque, but nevertheless true, that Montresor resented with peculiar vehemence the paltriness of Mrs. Rae's intrigue. Love, in its most secret recesses, is absurdly dramatic in its instinct, and excuses Cleopatra, who sold herself to rule the ruler of the world, while it will not forgive one who, thereby, merely gets her daily bread. If he was to be parted from Katherine, Montresor would have wished that, driven by the resistless doom of the

god's lust of gold, he could leave her, like Brunehilde, upon empyrean heights, guarded by leaping flames and circling Walküre; then, probably, like Siegfried, he would have quite comfortably forgotten all about her. As it was, his soul sickened at the thought of accepting as final this threadbare and venal contriver in place of the regal and candid beauty which had been his heart-picture.

This stung him into a sudden resolve: he would go at once to her, and she would break the spell of this hideous, absurd dream into which he had wandered. His watch showed it to be just five o'clock, and he was not far from her house; so he started in a swinging walk, thrusting aside doggedly the thought of how Katherine, who, when they were on friendly terms, had resented his most casual questioning upon this subject, would now bear an explicit inquisition. His temper was not improved when, nearing the house, he met Robinson going in the opposite direction; still, he gave him a courteous, if reserved, greeting in return for a much more pronounced and cordial one.

Instead of the door being opened by the usual starched and frigid butler, there appeared a tall and handsome parlor maid, the dainty frills of whose cap and apron, although crisp and immaculate, were not so inhuman in their conventionality. To add to this, there was a smile of mingled welcome and commiseration, as she said: "Mrs. Rae is not at home, Mr. Montresor. She has gone to St. John's to church," instead of the "Notat'omesir" with which he would have been decorously slapped in the face by the superior functionary. The sympathetic suggestiveness of her voice almost seemed to say:



"The service will be over about the time you could get there, and you might walk home with her."

Montresor had a strong memory for faces, and he at once recognized that of the maid as one he had seen before, but not at this house. He did not, however, busy his mind by trying to remember where, but rather what he could do to retrieve this ineffectual effort to eat humble pie; for as such he was forced to regard any new advance toward an understanding. It flashed upon his mind that he had in his pocket a letter which Mr. Singleton would like to see, as it related to English politics. In answer, therefore, to the information about Mrs. Rae, he slightly raised his eyebrows, and, giving his face a look of wonder why such irrelevant facts should be stated, asked:

"Is Mr. Singleton in?"

The maid's smile distinctly wilted, as she said:

"I think he is, sir. If you will wait in the drawing-room a minute I'll go and see."

As she drew aside the portière for him to pass into the familiar room there came over him a pleasurable thrill from what Darwin calls "associated habit," the reflex action of which was so strong that had Katherine herself walked in at that moment he would possibly have forgotten his inquisitorial attitude and odious explanations.

Everything in the room was just as he had last seen it, for Mrs. Rae was not one of those whose furniture leads a life of eternal probation; but, having once—wonderful woman—reconciled beauty and comfort, she left it alone, only changing non-essential details from time to time to preserve a sense of life—and, possibly, of growth.

One thing Montresor noticed, the significance of which, if, indeed, it had any, he was undecided how to interpret. There was a silver vase of rare workmanship, suggesting that of Benvenuto Cellini, which he admired very much, and whenever he had sent flowers they had been placed in it. Now, although there were two other vases, both filled with roses (indeed, rather too much crowded for symmetry), there were none in this silver one. Was this accidental or the result of feeling, and if the latter, what was the nature of it?

His thoughts were interrupted by the reappearance of the maid, and he suddenly recognized her as Mary MacManus, the girl who had come with Father Vincent to thank him for having befriended her father. As he was being shown to Mr. Singleton's den he asked her if he was not correct as to her identity.

"Yes, Mr. Montresor, I am Mary MacManus; but I didn't think you recognized me, which would be nothing strange, as you had only seen me once."

"I am glad," said Montresor, "to see you have such a good place."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," she responded, warmly. "Father Vincent asked Mrs. Rae to try me, and I hope she will like me. It won't be for want of my being anxious to please her if she don't."

Montresor was glad to hear the honest, loyal ring of her voice as she said this, although he disliked the look of design on the part of others, which her presence in the house seemed to suggest. Nothing more, however, was said, and he was soon ushered into Mr. Singleton's presence.

They shook hands cordially, for neither had felt

any difference in their previous pleasant relations toward each other; in fact, Montresor doubted if the coolness which existed between Mrs. Rae and himself had become known to Mr. Singleton, who, in the stress of the close of a busy session, could see very little of his sister or her friends, and could not be informed, as had been all the rest of their world, by the busy tongue of gossip.

After discussing the contents of the letter he had brought, the conversation turned upon the difference between the American Congress and British Parliament in their practical management of business.

"I can give you," said Singleton, "an illustration of one of the disadvantages under which we labor by telling you of a visit I had to-day from Mr. Robinson, the—lawyer. He is not, as you know, a Member of Congress, and yet he comes to me to treat regarding the management of several bills now before Congress. You have, no doubt, noticed the animated speculation in real estate going on in Washington?"

"Rather!" laughed Montresor. "It's spreading like the grippe, and will soon be in the kindergartens. If you see a young man and a young woman off in a corner, you may know they are forming a syndicate to buy corner lots and, by putting a few cartloads of city refuse in an oozy hollow, lay the foundation of their future fortune—and happiness. In fact, I have a mild case of it myself, and have just come from a real estate agent's, where I was inquiring about some land to which, it seems, the Thompson syndicate have the title—or will have when a bill now before Congress is passed."

"That is one of the very bills we were discussing; and, although not intrinsically important, it is

made, strategically, very much so by the position which the Congressional backers of the syndicate take about it. You see, it is only a month now before the fourth of March, when, by Constitutional limit, this Congress expires; and, as more than a hundred bills fail of passage in every Congress merely from lack of time, it matters a great deal where bills are on the calendar, and what support you can get to advance them rapidly. Now, this particular bill of the syndicate has immediate precedence of one in which I am very much interested—a bill to appropriate money to pay claims, under an old treaty, of certain citizens, mostly foreign, which claims were decided by our own courts, fifty years ago, to be just; but one Congress after another has failed to make the necessary appropriations. Robinson pointed out the advantage to me of having their bill out of the way of mine as promptly as possible, and proposed that, if my friends would vote for his bill, he could promise me fifteen or twenty votes for mine.”

“But,” said Montresor, who wished to see Robinson baffled in anything he attempted, “wouldn’t Robinson’s bill be out of your way just as much if you helped to defeat it as if you helped to pass it?”

“Yes; but it would take much longer to do it, for to defeat a bill backed by a solid phalanx requires discussion, which requires *time*, and that we can’t afford. Besides, we need their votes for our bill, as it hasn’t a great many devoted friends. You see, it takes an appropriation, and that makes every Member of Congress who has a bill that requires an appropriation look askance at it; and, as the greater part of this goes to foreigners, who can’t vote, it is difficult to persuade a Congressman that there is

any hurry about it. He says it had better go over for the next session. So it has been for fifty years."

"I hope you won't think me impertinent," said Montresor, "but I have been reading this bill of Robinson's to-day, and there is a clause in it which may have escaped your notice, and which seems to me a very dangerous one."

When Montresor had pointed it out, Singleton exclaimed:

"Well, I am ashamed of myself! I didn't notice it, although I only glanced over that part as merely a legal repetition. It is still more surprising that the Judiciary Sub-Committee should have reported it favorably; but two of them are ill, and the one in charge of this is very young, and is, I believe, attentive to one of Thompson's daughters. Yes; I must move to strike that clause out, although it will mean the delay and, perhaps, defeat of my own bill; for Robinson was most emphatic about opposing all amendments."

"Since," said Montresor, "you have been merciful to me, and have not shown me the door for my meddling, I will venture a suggestion. The adverse titles to all the land which will be affected by this bill can be bought for about six thousand dollars. Don't you think, therefore, that the syndicate could be induced to pay this money and withdraw the bill, especially since the principal bill, that for the viaducts and streets, is behind yours, and any delay which affects you affects them? It is likely, from what you tell me, that Robinson will oppose its being dropped; but don't you think that, rather than have a discussion upon this particular clause, he might give in?"

"Whether he does or not," said Singleton, "I know Allibone, who is in charge of the bill, will refuse to hold out when he knows that the matter can be cleared up for such a trifling sum. How soon are you to hear definitely what these quit-claims can be bought for?"

"The agent told me he expected to have a telegram to-morrow morning," replied Montresor.

"Capital!" said Singleton, with warmth. "I am to dine with Allibone to-morrow, 'very quietly'; which, I expect, means that I shall meet Thompson, and no doubt we can talk it over. Fortunately, Robinson is sure not to be there, for he leaves to-morrow for the South, to be gone four or five days; so there is less likelihood of opposition, and he may find it all attended to when he returns."

Singleton's eye certainly had a twinkle in it as he said this; and Montresor rose to take his leave, feeling much satisfaction in the prospect of spiking one of Robinson's guns.

"It would be just as well," said Singleton, "if you did not mention that this solution of the problem is your suggestion, for some of the Members might resent following the idea of a foreigner. You know," he added, laughing, "we are very strong on the Monroe Doctrine."

Singleton rang for the servant, but, as Montresor reached the hall, there was no one to show him out. He wondered if Mrs. Rae had returned, and, glancing at the umbrella-stand, noticed that one umbrella, which he well knew to be hers, and which had been missing when he entered, was now in its place. At the same time the delicate clink of china and the murmurous hissing, which he heard through the por-

tière of the drawing-room, told him Katherine was having her tea, and apparently alone. As he paused for a moment, he remembered how once he had laughingly told her that the hissing was like that of an amiable serpent, making things cosy for its victim, and that men all over England and America were being beguiled between five and six of the clock. What a merry, intimate laugh she had given, as she replied :

"The Fall of Man in three acts! Knowledge of Good—that's me; and Evil—that's the truth I tell you about yourself; then, third and last and climax—something for you to *eat!*"

What a difference there was now in their relations! and he could not think it was his own fault. At any rate, he would try to learn—and how glad he would be if it were!

He went to the drawing-room door, his hand was upon the portière, when suddenly he heard Robinson's voice saying, in his common, cheeky tones :

"I've won!"

It didn't matter that by the response, in the voice of Miss Thompson, from the further drawing-room, he realized that Robinson was referring to some disputed point they had gone in there to settle; it was all the same—he must go. With this syndicate trio he had no place.

When he had reached the front door, the maid, who had entered the hall, said, in as loud a voice as was permitted a servant :

"Mr. Montresor, isn't this your overcoat, sir, you are leaving?"

There was a momentary, but distinct, pause in the conversation on the other side of the portière.

Then Mrs. Rae, in a voice which, although pitched in a chatty tone, contained a delicate strain of aloofness, said :

"What a real tempest in a teapot I am having here!—and this flame will not go down. May I trouble you, Mr. Robinson, to touch that bell? The servants seem to have deserted the house. Do you take cream and sugar?"

"No, thanks; lemon, if you please," replied Robinson. And then, as if determined to neutralize the inference of formal acquaintance contained in her question, added: "No one seems ever to remember how I take my tea. I suppose it's because I am so good-tempered and sweet, that no one can think of an acid in connection with me."

"Fortunately," was Mrs. Rae's rejoinder, "I seem to have some lemon to-day. It is not often that I do."

"Then, it appears I have been lucky," persisted Robinson, "and ought to feel boastful?"

"That is a matter of temperament," was the response, in a fastidious voice.

"Then you think I should boast?" Robinson insisted, with a chuckling laugh.

"You must judge for yourself," she replied, placidly. "It is a question of the law which every man is unto himself. The question of fact, although a small one, is perfectly evident—one cup of acidulated tea."

"But I *like* acidulated tea," answered Robinson, complacently.

Mrs. Rae's reply would have seemed commiserating, had not her voice been so dispassionate, as she said :



"I suppose one can become habituated to anything."

While this conversation proceeded, Montresor had been putting on his overcoat, assisted by Mary, who, however, was rather ineffectual, as, having heard her mistress complain of being deserted by the servants, she cast longing glances toward the drawing-room. She was amazed, and still further perplexed, when she saw Montresor, who had distinctly given the impression that he had called only on Mr. Singleton, take from his card-case two cards and place them on the table as, after Mrs. Rae's last recorded words, he left the house.

## CHAPTER XII

### SENATOR RONDERSON AN ALLY AGAINST ROBINSON

MONTRESOR had two motives in leaving his cards, as mentioned in the last chapter. One was the desire to make Miss Thompson and Robinson think (if they saw them) that there had been no such serious rupture between Mrs. Rae and himself as to prevent his calling upon her, while the other was the hope that it might lead, in some way, to an actual resumption of more natural intercourse.

The conversation he had heard through the portière showed she was still unwilling that Robinson should be considered on an intimate footing in her house. Nor could Montresor rid himself of the feeling that she had uttered the words for his own ears, especially, and was not really so careless of his good opinion as had appeared in their last interview, several weeks before—they seemed *months* now. This thought could not but bring solace, even though circumstances had made her seem undeserving of that good opinion.

The next morning, in reading the *Post*, his eye fell upon this item :

"Mrs. Rae leaves this morning on the ten o'clock Limited to visit Mrs. Vandecker, wife of the great New York banker. She expects to return in about a week."

A little lower down in the same column he read :

"Mr. A. L. Vandecker, the New York banker, has been on here for a few days. It is understood that he is one of the syndicate which proposes to do so much for the development of our suburbs."

Slinging the paper from him, he called to his man, who was in the next room, to bring his hat and overcoat. The latter, after seeing Montresor out, returned and imperturbably picked up the paper, the angry rustle of which he had heard, and, smoothing it, proceeded to look for what had caused the explosion of feeling. This he soon did, for he labored under no illusions as to whether his master was or was not still interested in Mrs. Rae's movements.

Montresor walked quickly along H Street, past St. John's Church, down Fourteenth, past Small's, the florist, each place giving him a twinge of bitter thought, and, turning into F Street, soon reached the real estate agent's office. He was shown a telegram which said that the quit-claims could be bought for seven thousand dollars, and authorized the closing of the sale.

As we know, Montresor had, in practical matters, none of that many-sided indecision which marked him in psychological difficulties; and, although not rich, he determined to risk his own money in securing this first trick in the game against Robinson. He sat down at once and wrote a check for five hundred dollars to bind the bargain, asking the agent not to mention him in the matter, as another person would be the one to take title—that he himself was moving in it for the benefit of a friend. All business men well know this "friend" who figures in so many transactions, from the reorganization of a railroad to the cheapening of a pair of stockings—

this silent partner who always finds such a ready exponent of his wishes.

As Montresor was leaving, the agent said to him :

"By the way, I learned yesterday that Mrs. Rae is having the mortgage foreclosed on Mrs. Weeks."

This was staggering news, after that of the *Post's* social column. How, deeper and deeper, she was entangling herself in this "syndicate gang," as he had heard them called! When returning, he again passed St. John's Church, and thought, with bitter cynicism, that his effort at reconciliation had been defeated by her absence at *prayers*.

"I wonder," he forced himself to say, "if, like Louis XI, she was praying to be forgiven 'for this one little sin' she is 'about to commit'—robbing a widow?"

He did not know that Mrs. Weeks was a widow. (In fact, she was not one, but had a passably worthless husband, who was at sea.) Then he added, with a sense of humor which sometimes obtruded itself into his most serious thoughts :

"But she, also, is a widow, which, I suppose, makes it all right for her to rob another widow. After all, doesn't the church take the widow's mite? 'Take' is a more proper-sounding word than 'rob,' but the effect is just the same."

Here his reflections again took a very natural and easy turn against the Church and Religion. His unconquerable desire to free Katherine from blame for her misdoings made him ready to place it upon the Church. Did it not set a constant example for acquisitiveness, ever begging, and ever crying, like the horse-leech's daughter, "Give!—Give!"? Where it was forced to abandon the frank and equal collec-

tion of tithes, did it not enforce an indirect and more gallingly capricious tax upon souls? Could there be found richer purples or finer linen than in the Church, and was it not one of the common sayings that "no preacher had ever felt himself called to a lower salary"? Had he not been told that morning of the purchase from the syndicate of a site for an Episcopal cathedral on "reasonable" terms, thus adding to the speculation a still more potent social influence than that of the Catholics? Truly, he could hear these Knights of the Temple chanting, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," as with fervid courage they pressed on to Jerusalem the *Golden*. How well some priests, with the hardy effrontery of the Brazen Serpent, effaced their worship of the Golden Calf! Could he condemn a woman for hypocrisy, when she had such men as teachers?

Montresor ought to have realized how foolish it was to charge Mrs. Rae with sanctimoniousness; but in his temper, like so many of us, he regarded going to church as an assertion of holiness, rather than a confession of sin.

Then he sought to make excuses for Katherine in another way: Was not the Professor's suggestion a correct one? Did it not require the constant struggle between Right Impulses and Wrong Impulses to produce a perfectly stable and symmetrical spiritual form, just as the perpetual war between the Centrifugal Force and that of Gravitation molded the radiant spheres of a material universe? The man who never bore a weight would never grow strong. Sir Philip Sydney, being asked by his squire why he trembled as he was preparing for battle, replied:

"My body is trembling because of the danger into which it knows my soul will take it."

And so, the cautious vigilance of Cowardice steadying the rushing heedlessness of Courage, he went into the conflict the perfect knight.

It was easy to find illustrations both in nature and humanity; but, after all, it came back to the question: Would Katherine withstand this temptation, and—why had she lied to *him* about walking with Robinson in G Street? It was not what she would be after further years of psychic evolution, but what she was now—above all, what she was to him individually. He could not treat her as an abstract problem in moral mathematics. Fancy writing her out on paper thus:

Let  $G$  = Right Impulses

$B$  = Wrong Impulses

$R$  = Resultant

Then  $G - B = R = \text{Katherine}$ .

No! A parallelogram of forces might interest, but could excite in him no longing; nor could he write sonnets to its eyebrow. The Professor's theory of universally contending impersonal forces of Right and Wrong might be more thinkable than the Christian one, of a soul, with such *definite* qualities and such *indefinite* exhibitions of them; but it was not nearly so satisfying. He would rather believe that some souls—Katherine's, for instance (it did not matter about his own)—sprang into existence, like Minerva, fully armed and invincible. If he found such a belief untenable, he would then play the game out as it came, and be a good loser, if lose he must.

In his eagerness to score against Robinson he at

once wrote to Singleton, telling what he had done, and adding that he would, of course, turn the purchase over to the syndicate, if they so desired, and his own name need not appear in the matter, as one of the real estate agent's clerks was the ostensible purchaser. He suggested, with some shrewdness, that the syndicate had better not know the purchase was secured before they had consented to the plan, as they might delay action until Robinson's return, and thus endanger its success.

That day being Saturday, and the next, consequently, one on which little could be done, Montresor was unable to avoid some anxiety as to the progress of matters. He, therefore, in the hope of meeting Singleton, went, after dinner, to the weekly reception of a Cabinet Minister's wife, who sought to give it somewhat the *cachet* of a salon.

There were several groups scattered about the room, and he joined one which seemed to be the most amusing, and contained, among others, the German Secretary of Legation whose English was so unmanageable, a French diplomat of high position, and a Senator named Ronderson, from one of the newer Western States. This Senator, Montresor had heard, was one of those who would support the syndicate scheme, although there was supposedly no great love lost between Elton and himself. They were quite different in character, and each was "talked of" for future Presidential nomination.

Senator Ronderson was, perhaps, typical of successful men in the United States. He had none of the refinements of education, but, with a wonderfully retentive memory and a powerful mind, backed by a big, warm heart, made more impression upon

his fellow-Senators than those who, with finer points to their lances, had not the same force and directness of purpose. He had been abroad some time, and, although he never really acquired the language of any country, his retentive memory never forgot a sound and its meaning. He was liked by all the Diplomatic Corps, who forgave his roughness, and were not, all of them, able to appreciate the lack of elegance in his English.

A discussion regarding languages had been started by the German asking a lady to explain what she meant in saying of a charming English girl who was present that she was "the daughter of an hundred earls."

"What does that mean? How can she be the daughter of one hundred earls?"

And then, when she, half-doubting whether he was serious or earnest, had proceeded to tell what it meant, he said:

"What an odd language is your English! That reminds me I haf see to-day, in one of your books, that, at a restaurant in Boston, the hero had eaten 'picked-up codfeesh.' Now, tell me, what does it mean? Was it a feesh which he found in the streets? It does not sound fery nice."

Senator Ronderson explained that it was a dish made with fish and milk.

"Yet it is a very comic expression," pursued the German.

"It's no funnier," retorted the Senator, "than to speak of a 'jumped flounder,' which, I take it, is what you mean when you say 'sole sautee.' Now, look," continued he, "at what the French call 'home.' They haven't got any such word, but the next thing to it



is 'chez nous,' and then 'l'interieur,' or 'logis.' Just think of that beautiful poem, 'Home, Sweet Home,' put in French!"

Here one of his friends, who knew it, begged him to give them the translation, which he had made into French, and he accordingly gave it.

The others all laughed when he ended, except the German and the Frenchman—the former because the Senator had been assuming that *he* was interested in the French language, and the latter because he could not regard any criticism of his country as humorous; so, with something of an edge in his voice, he retorted:

"Well, if we have not a *word* which pleases you, we have the thing itself in great abundance, and of as good a quality as our English-speaking friends."

"Well—I d-o-n-t know about that," returned the Senator, in a doubting, yet big, good-natured voice, as though anxious to concede the other's point, but compelled by a sense of truth to withhold it. "At least, it ain't *my* idea of a home——"

"Mon Dieu! j'e l'espère!" ejaculated the Frenchman, in a stage aside.

"You select a particular slice out of a big, dirty-white block of stucco," proceeded the Senator, "and then, as you go into the little cave that has been dug into it, a man—or perhaps it's a woman with a man's mustache—calls out to you: 'Mister, does he wish something?' He is new to the place and don't know that you are one of the twenty masters. 'I am the Count of Chateau Margaux—to the four devils,' say you. '*Au cinquième*,' says he, and to the fifth you go. You go round and round, up flights of stairs, and presently stop at a door in the wall on

one of the landings and try your key; but it doesn't fit—that isn't your *home*——”

“But, you forget, Senator,” interrupted the other, testily, “that I am a Frenchman, and, therefore, not tipsy.”

“Well, now, Count,” continued the Senator, in bluff good humor, “who's telling this story, you or me? *I* say that you stop at the wrong door—perhaps because you *are* a Frenchman. But you go on, and then stop at another door in the wall, and this time you get in. If you had got in below—downstairs, I mean—it would have looked just the same—great, high, cold room; nothing in it but a few stiff, white chairs and sofas, and a clock on the mantelpiece with a naked brass boy on top—he has to be brass, you know. You go sliding over a bare, icy floor, and sit in the middle of the room on one of those stiff chairs, and converse with Madame, and freeze. Now, Count, that ain't *my* idea of home.”

“No,” rejoined the Count; “I shall tell you what is your idea of home. It is a big, white house with green shutters, and a ‘parlor’ with chromos, and a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation hung on the walls, with a red-hot stove, and a red-hot carpet with big vegetable figures on it; and you sit in a rocking-chair and have a dozen children climb all over you, and knock the breath out of you—that is your home.”

“They say,” put in the German, willing to have a temporary Franco-German alliance for the sake of prodding the Senator, “that you put even the red-hot stove in your bedded rooms. Is that to overwarm your domestic affection? Do you say ‘overwarm,’ or is it ‘warm over’?”

"You say 'overwarm'," responded the Senator, "when, with the rest of the furniture, you are cooped up in one corner of a German bedroom, occupied by one of your colossal tile-stoves, which has been started on a cold day and hasn't got a-going until the weather changed—lost its stride, as I have seen a ge-loved Hausfrau do when hitched to a plow with a horse."

Imperturbably, the German retorted :

"Very like it was a weak horse from America and could not go so fast as the stark German Hausfrau."

"Oh," said the Senator, "this was just a homely country Hausfrau, and not a high ge-born schnellzug like those Vasali tells us about in Berlin society."

The German, who was of the inner court circle, rather winced at the allusion to these gossipy memoirs; and Montresor, who liked the Senator very much, threw himself into the breach by saying :

"Senator, if you find the German stove takes more than its share of the room, you ought to give them one of your coy American folding-beds."

"My dear boy," replied the Senator, "if you had ever read an English poem called 'The Deserted Village,' you would know that 'a bed by night, a chest of drawers by day,' was an English invention."

The laugh caused by this smoothed out matters, although not in the way Montresor had intended; and the Frenchman returned to the charge :

"But come, Senator; you have said nothing about the *dinner* I get in my home."

"Nothing but *hash*, Count, of different kinds. First you have soup, which is the essence of hash; then fish *en coquille*—hash again; then *timbales* of chicken—more hash; then beef *à la mode*—still more

hash; salad, which is hash; and pudding glacé; and if any of those things you have been eating ever had a good, honest flavor of its own, you don't know it. I'll tell you a fact, sir. Last fall I sent a French friend some canvas-back ducks, which I had shot, myself, down at Carroll's Island. He invited me to dine with him and help to eat them. After I had starved myself all through dinner, in order to do justice to them, they came on *fried*, with a sauce all over them, and I could taste onions, garlic, bacon, chestnuts—everything on earth except canvas-back duck. When I gazed at that mutilated and bedeviled heap of what had once been such a delicately fed high-flyer, I felt like a murderer; I should have liked to strangle the chef, my companion in crime, with his own blue string."

"And yet, Senator, you have a saying that 'good Americans when they die go to Paris.'"

"Well, perhaps that is so," responded the Senator; "at any rate, I never met any *live* 'good' Americans in Paris; I even had suspicions about my own goodness before I left there."

They all, especially the Frenchman, laughed at the mock slyness with which the Senator smacked his lips over this avowal; and one of the women of the group suggested that, if he was going to confess, perhaps they had better leave.

At this moment Mrs. Sympkins-Smythe entered upon Elton's arm, arrayed in one of Worth's most wonderful creations, but daringly décolleté; and the display of bones and yellow flesh was not attractive. But the Frenchman, who was quite a connoisseur in dress, had an eye only for the garment; besides, he thought Mrs. Sympkins-Smythe was *chic*, what-

ever that may be. Unmindful of the Senator's well-known antipathy for her, he said, with enthusiasm:

"At least, you can admire that French gown."

"Well, yes, I do; and I only wish there was *more* of it. *That*, ladies and gentlemen, is what I call a bare statement of facts."

There was a laugh at this rather rough speech, and all then huddled into such tame, loquacious commonplaces as amounted to a suspicious silence; seeing which—for no personal mood ever escaped him—Elton said, jauntily:

"What evil were you saying of us? You see, like unsuspicious lambs, we have walked right up to you bloody-minded wolves."

"Well, Elton," replied Ronderson, "like George Washington, we are in such a fix that, as Tom Sawyer says, 'there don't seem no way out of it but to tell the truth.' We were admiring your costume. Ordered it to address the Labor Union next week at Chicago, didn't you?"

It was notorious that Elton had for such occasions, when he was to meet "the plain people," an old, ill-fitting dress-coat, innocent of pressing, which, with straight-dangling tails, suggested Donnybrook Fair; or, when in New England, he buttoned it in front, hoping to remind his audience of Daniel Webster. He was used to such allusions, and scarcely resented them; less so on this occasion, because the suit, a recent arrival from London, "fitted him as if it had been made for him," to repeat Bridgmond's later criticism. Being conscious of this, he felt himself to have a distinction in social appearance equal to that which belonged to him in the political field.

Distinction, however, was too strong an expression; extra-genteel described it better.

In this matter of evening clothes there was a paradoxical difference between the two men. For, although Elton's people were plain and poor New England farmers, yet for several generations they all had its good common-school education, to say nothing of the system of Lyceum Lectures and Church Sociables which pervades that region. On the other hand, Ronderson came of a family which, originally from New England, had for a hundred years followed our frontier westward, moving on when neighbors began to "crowd" within ten miles, until, meeting the returning wave of settlement from the Pacific Slope, they could move no further, and gathered, at last, some of the moss which, in their rolling state, had failed them. The Senator's education had been desultory and his social experiences limited to cowboy dances. Yet his evening coat hung from his broad, square shoulders with a smooth negligence which made him seem at home in it; and if, after dinner, the bosom of his shirt showed an ambitious tendency, it seemed rather accident than awkwardness. In clothes, as in other mere details of life, he gave some thought at the outset to have them right, after which he did not worry. If he had obeyed a summons to that levee which Carlyle pictures in "Sartor Resartus," where all men were to appear without disguise of clothing, he would have carried himself with the unconscious ease born of strong purpose; as did St. Francis of Assisi when, stripped of his clothes, he appeared in the market place and delivered them up as a sign of repudiating his father's degrading control.

Very soon, by reason of rapid accessions, the group became so large that it broke of its own weight and disintegrated. In this process Montresor presently found himself in another room, and as he was standing for a moment alone, examining an ornament on the mantelpiece, he was accosted by Singleton, who said :

"If you came here alone, won't you let me give you a lift home? I shall be going by twelve, or earlier if you like."

This invitation Montresor readily accepted, and Singleton passed on.

The Cinderella-like hour named was not really as early as it sounded, since the drawing-room clock, which usually kept excellent time, had a habit of giving out on Saturday nights and being almost an hour late. This was in deference to the politicians' constituencies; for, whatever of things British we Americans may have renounced besides their taxes, we still cling with dogged persistency to their frigid attitude toward Sunday.

When the time for departure approached, Montresor returned to the room opening into the hall, and noticed Senator Ronderson standing with Elton near a lamp, and pointing out to him some passage on one of those slips upon which bills before Congress are printed. They were too far for him to hear a single word; but Montresor could see that Ronderson, whose whole bearing had changed, made some short, decisive comment, and the other looked uneasy and chagrined, but, apparently, acquiesced.

The colloquy was brief, and, as the Senators moved toward the door, they were brought near to the group in which Montresor was standing;

and when a man asked the conventional, inane question, "Are you going?" Ronderson responded:

"Why, of course we are. Don't you see it is about to strike twelve? If you detain us political Cinderellas, you'll see our clothes changed right here before your eyes, which would be scandalous; and *one* of us will leave a glass slipper, which you may mistake for the President's greenhouse."

"But, Senator," said a matter-of-fact newcomer, "that clock is more than half an hour slow, anyhow."

"Is that so?" said Ronderson. "What a fortune it would be to a politician if he could lie with as calm a face as that clock! You see, our constituents demand so many lies of us that, to get through with 'em, and do them well, we have to use machinery; just as in India they use praying machines, run by a waterfall, to keep in with *their* gods. The hour makes it straight with the body of the people; and we tell the Germans, who don't believe in a painful Sunday, that the clock is a sanctimonious liar—that really we broke the Sabbath all to bits."

In passing out, Ronderson encountered Singleton, and, while only a few words were exchanged, it could be seen that they were of a satisfactory nature.

As Singleton and Montresor were driving away, the former remarked:

"The plan you suggested for getting the title bill out of the way promises to work beautifully. Ronderson was at Allibone's dinner; and when he understood the situation he expressed himself so forcibly that both Allibone and Thompson, although reluctant at first, became enthusiastically in favor of it. Allibone was made to understand with clearness that



it would be a serious matter for him if, in the beginning of his career, he favored a bill which could be so severely criticised. And yet Ronderson did not take a 'holier than thou' attitude about it, but it was just a man-to-man, common-sense honesty, business talk. Neither Thompson nor Allibone seemed to have understood that the titles could so easily be cleared in the ordinary way. They had left the whole matter to Robinson. Ronderson undertook to speak to Elton about it, who, he said, would be sure to assent when he found there was anything in the bill which looked at all tricky."

It was too dark in the carriage to see Singleton's face, but, as he finished, Montresor could almost feel a wink; and thus felt encouraged to ask:

"Do you think Robinson will make any trouble when he gets back?"

"Why—after all," responded Singleton, "Congress has the constitutional right to dispose of the matter without his consent; but this is immaterial, for, in fact, I think it will all be over when he gets back. Thompson said he would telegraph him, but he did not know whether he had the right address; and so Robinson will probably not get the telegram until it is too late."

Again Montresor felt a wink flitting through the gloom.

"Ronderson suggested," continued Singleton, "a way of getting rid of it. The plan is for Allibone to ask unanimous consent to take up House Bill No. 777, for the purpose of getting it out of the way; and as every member is anxious to have every bill, except his own, out of the way, no one will oppose. Then the Republican leader will move to 'lay on the

table,' and a couple of technical motions will nail it there so fast that, as Ronderson said, 'it will have no more chance of passing than the tenth commandment.' "

Singleton paused, as if he had finished the subject; so Montresor said:

"I hope all this is not going to make trouble for you in getting your foreign 'Claim Bill' passed?"

"Oh, no!" was the reply. "Ronderson took the whole affair out of my hands, and shoulders all the work and responsibility. Common straightforwardness is sufficient motive for him; but he also wishes to have as few debatable bills—and any *bad* bill must be debated—go on to the Senate, as delay is the only thing which can prevent the ratification of the Extradition Treaty with England, which he has in charge. So, you see, your suggestion may be of service to your country. Perhaps that was your little plot."

"Please don't shoot!" said Montresor, with a short laugh.

Again there was silence for a few seconds, and again it was broken by Singleton, who, in a rather hurried manner, said:

"Ronderson has the most remarkable memory I ever knew. He's a perfect terror to other Senators—remembers their old speeches better than they do themselves, and gags them with them. He gave quite an exhibition of it this evening. It seems that months ago he was looking over the court records here about something entirely different, and yet he remembered noticing that my sister, Mrs. Rae, has a mortgage on one of those pieces of land. If I ever knew, I had forgotten all

about it. But she won't let me have anything to do with her business affairs, as she thinks I have too much to attend to. The woman who owns it—Thompson says her name is Weeks—will, if this scheme goes through, make a nice little sum of money, and I suppose will pay off the mortgage; so my sister will have to find a new investment, which is often very difficult to do. Really, it looks as if I ought to oppose the bill."

This was ended in a jocular manner in keeping with the casual tone adopted in mentioning the facts, and Montresor would have answered in the same strain; but the other continued, as if to shut off conversation on that topic:

"Ronderson told us a rather funny story on himself apropos of his good memory."

This diversion was welcomed by the other, who asked to hear the story, and by the time it was finished the cab came to a halt.

Montresor assumed, from what Singleton had said concerning the Weeks mortgage, that when he learned of the contemplated foreclosure he would prevent it. There was little consolation in this thought, however, since the ugly fact remained that Mrs. Rae had been willing to exact a harsh penalty from a poor woman, until prevented by her brother. It is true that if crimes existing only in thought were punished, few men would go unchanged; but, where one is dealing with ideal characters, tendencies are as portentous as overt acts. Still, Montresor could not help feeling more tranquil when freed from the fear of the world viewing Katherine in such an unfavorable light.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A NEW THEORY CONCERNING ROBINSON

THE desire that the land speculation in which Mrs. Rae was interested should not be smirched by so dubious a measure as the "Bill to Perfect Title" was sufficient incentive for Montresor's opposition to it, without taking into consideration his general antagonism toward Thompson and Robinson. But, the day when the matter was to come up in the House, his personal feeling regarding it was further augmented by receiving a letter which showed that its enactment might have a decided effect upon the suit against Lady Broadlands' property—already mentioned as one reason for his coming to America.

This land had suddenly become very valuable by the discovery of coal deposits, and in the course of a few months thereafter Lady Broadlands' lawyers found that the only flaw in her title lay in the lack of proof of the date upon which a distant cousin, named Black, had died. He had been Warren Hastings' secretary, and, just before the great impeachment, mysteriously disappeared from India, never to be heard of afterward, although there was a rumor that he came to America. The lawyers, however, made no serious effort to trace him, as they were confident that the claim might be defeated by the statute of limitations and other technicalities. But neither

Montresor nor his family were content with such a defense, and the former had determined upon a personal search in this country to discover the truth of the matter, even should it result in establishing a date adverse to his interests.

Shortly after arriving in Washington, he mentioned these facts to Father Vincent, whom he happened to meet more frequently, during the first few weeks, than any other man of his acquaintance.

The priest was quite a social lion just then, for, besides his personal attractiveness, it was whispered that the Pope, having regard to the tremendous strides Catholicism was making in America, had sent him as an emissary to look over the ground. The liberality of his views, or sentiments, and the naive openness of his naturally subtle mind made his personality an interesting one to Montresor. There was between them a sympathetic bond, in that smiling, philosophic sufferance toward Life, which on one side was a somewhat derisive indulgence, and on the other a simple faith in divine purpose. That immutable mutability in mankind, which each acknowledged, Montresor thought proceeded in a circle, Father Vincent in a straight line; yet neither found it possible to be intolerant of the other.

In the comparative intimacy of this intercourse it was inevitable that the suit against Lady Broadlands should eventually be the subject of conversation, especially as upon several occasions the priest mentioned other American claims against English property.

A couple of weeks after Montresor had given Father Vincent the details, the latter told him he had procured from a friend some additional information

upon the matter. He said that Black (Warren Hastings' secretary) had come to America, settled in Georgia, where he married and had several children; but, like Gilbert à Becket, he had, when in India, already taken for a wife a native woman of rank, and she, with the same fidelity as the more historic woman, followed him to this country, where her presence had resulted in a lawsuit as to the rights of the two wives.

Beyond these facts Father Vincent could learn nothing, as his informant, a Member of Congress from Maryland, named Ridgeway, only knew of them incidentally, his father having purchased some land from one of Black's heirs.

Even before these conversations, Montresor had made inquiries as to the charges of lawyers and detectives for their services in such investigations, and he was somewhat staggered by the cost. He spoke of it to Father Vincent, who told him that the Catholic Church had frequent occasion to trace both people and titles in this country, and he could, therefore, speak with confidence in recommending MacManus as one accustomed to such work, efficient, and very reasonable in his prices. Montresor's surprised comment elicited further explanation: MacManus had been employed by a solicitor, first as a servant and then in a position resembling a clerkship. He was sent to America to search for evidence regarding some property bequeathed to the Catholic Church, and had decided to remain, where he had been so successful as to be able to support in comfort a bed-ridden father and mother, as well as his daughter Mary, the last named of whom, however, was now earning her own living. He dressed like a simple

laboring man, when he could afford more expensive clothes, because of a sort of loyal pride, which forbade his separating himself, even in dress, from the class to which his family and friends belonged. It was partly through this feeling, but principally on account of its business value, that he continued, in this country, to be called simply Thomas MacManus, instead of Thomas MacManus Neal, which change had arisen in the lawyer's office to distinguish him from another Thomas Neal.

Montresor had seen MacManus two or three times after the latter's arrival in Washington, and was still favorably impressed; but when it was proposed to employ him upon the investigation of Lady Broadlands' case, the scene in the hospital, indicating Robinson's acquaintance and, perhaps, connection with the man, could not but recur and give him ground for hesitation. With characteristic frankness, he said to Father Vincent:

"As to intrusting MacManus with this business, while I have no doubt of his capacity, is it not possible that, at some point, he might find himself with divided inclinations? He seems very grateful to me for an ordinary piece of humanity—if I knew any man who wouldn't do what I did, I'd cut him—but suppose the people on the other side, or their lawyers, should turn out to be Irish, or influential in Irish politics? As a man knowing the world, do you think I could count upon him?"

"Not as a man knowing the world, but as a man and a priest knowing MacManus, I will vouch for him," Father Vincent responded, earnestly.

Montresor further reflected that, although there might be technical political affiliation between Rob-

inson and MacManus, there was certainly no cordiality, and he could see no valid reason for withholding that confidence in the priest's indorsement to which he was naturally inclined. He, therefore, concluded an arrangement, which in every practical aspect seemed advantageous; and MacManus had been nearly two months in Georgia, at work upon the case, when he forwarded a report in the letter to which allusion has been made in the beginning of this chapter.

In it he gave details of a laborious search, through court records, tax assessment and church lists, custom-house, lawyers', chemists', and undertakers' accounts, and finally discovered that there had once been in the Probate Office of the District of Columbia a record which, if in existence, would prove, circumstantially, whether or not Black was alive later than 1802—the turning point in the case. Unfortunately, the record had been burned when the British captured Washington in 1814; but two certified copies of it had been made, one of which, he inferred, was in the possession of the claimant against Lady Broadlands, in which case he was evidently holding it back for some reason best known to himself. The other copy, MacManus wrote, was probably still in existence, and he was endeavoring to trace it.

The coincidence revealed by this report was sufficient to catch the attention of an imagination much less active than Montresor's. Supposing there was something defective, or adverse to themselves, in the certified copy held by the claimants? If this bill, which Robinson was pushing so strenuously, became law, they could have a *copy of a copy* recorded in the identical court where it was needed. And the accu-



racy of that copy might depend upon some tipsy consul in the Antipodes.

Robinson's specialty was the promotion of flimsy claims, for which he received tremendous fees, contingent upon success. Nothing would be more natural, therefore, than that he should be interested in this one. The theory was strengthened by other circumstances now recalled by Montresor, the most significant being the fact that at the Metropolitan Club he had, through error, received a letter addressed to Robinson, bearing upon it the names of the American lawyers for the claimant. Should the title bill be necessary, to conceal any defect in this missing certified copy, Montresor fully believed Robinson would urge its passage "in order to protect his client," with which euphemistic phrase lawyers sometimes express their collusion in crime.

With his keener interest thus aroused in the defeat of the "Title Bill," he determined to go himself to the House and, from the gallery, see what was done with it. As he drove to the Capitol, he passed Singleton's house, and his mind was so occupied with Robinson that it was scarcely a surprise to see that person himself emerge from a Pennsylvania station hansom and ring the door-bell. It was already past twelve, and, the House being in session, the visit could not be for Singleton, which left an alternative most disagreeable to Montresor.

He had scarcely been seated ten minutes in the gallery of the House when Allibone asked unanimous consent to take up House Bill No. 777 and dispose of it. This was a critical moment, for the objection of a single member would block the whole plan; and, although that tower of strength, Senator Ronder-

son, was backing it, and the leaders of both parties had seconded the motion, Montresor's excitement was intense. No one objected, and the bill was read rapidly, but clearly, by the reading clerk. Montresor watched for the objectionable clause, to see if it would make any impression; but it did not, nor would it had it provided for the hanging of the President, as no one paid the least attention. When the clerk finished, there came a trilogy, shot off with the velocity and precision of so many machine guns, in which tumult of "lay-on-the-table," "take-up-from-the-table," "recommit," and "reconsider," with accompanying chorus of "Ay-yi," "No-no," from two members, Montresor was utterly lost. When the Speaker wound up with, "The-motion-to-reconsider-is-lost," Montresor turned and saw Robinson seated just behind him. His usually florid face was a trifle pale, while the smile and nod he gave seemed forced.

"Can you tell me," asked Montresor, "what this clatter means?"

"Under the show of expediting," was the response, "they got it up, then allowed it to be laid on the table, and nailed it there. Reminds me of the heir who, when he saw '*Resurgam*' on his uncle's tomb, said, 'Divil-a-bit,' and made them write, instead, '*Requiescat in pace*.'"

"It seems to me," said Montresor, looking hard at Robinson, and striving to do a little mind, or rather face, reading, "that, from what I heard, it ought to be killed, as one of the clauses might encourage fraud."

"It's dead," Robinson replied, in hard tones. "'*De mortuis* . . .,' you know."

"And they tell no tales," suggested Montresor.

"You should read detective stories, Mr. Montresor." He looked steadily at Montresor, with a glance which the latter could not analyze. Was it aroused suspicion, or hatred, or simply a bored endeavor to answer the mood of his interlocutor?

However untranslatable his expression might be, that inimical atmosphere, of which Montresor had been conscious from the first, was still more certain now, since it had, if proceeding from conflicting business interests, at last an adequate explanation. The probabilities thus strengthened, it seemed but ordinary prudence to take measures for preventing Robinson from learning anything of the whereabouts and doings of MacManus. Father Vincent occasionally met Robinson regarding the proposed grant of land for the Catholic University, and Montresor determined to make sure that no such information should, accidentally, be given by him.

Accordingly, as twilight was gathering, he started for Georgetown, in which elderly and poor relation of the capital Father Vincent was residing. His journey began upon smooth asphalt paving, led him through broad avenues, parked and beautified during the extravagant administration of Boss Shephard, and lined with stately public buildings or imposing residences, from gaunt severity to a mongrel Renaissance, but all expressing profuse wealth. Leaving behind Success, with its urgent throng, he was soon traveling over rough cobblestones, through narrow and deserted streets, where Failure, with pathetic resignation, dwelt in somber peace. Lofty stone houses, which, from spacious grounds, had once looked down condescendingly upon the low-built,

rusty brick dwellings of the street, were now pathetic in harmless ignorance of their own faded and spent condition; and near at hand little corner shops, with timid importunity, offered for sale the violet merinos and sad jewelry of a vanished age.

In the beautiful cemetery, taking its name from the stream dividing the two places, there is a figure by St. Gaudens, representing, with miraculous genius, the Nirvana of Buddhism—The Death of Thought—which might well be the tutelary deity of the place.

The ancient tranquillity of the region was further impressed upon Montresor's imagination when, after the mellow tinkling of a bell at the side entrance of Georgetown College, a brother in faded cassock appeared and, leading the way, through dark and winding passages, ushered him into a room of gaunt austerity, just such a one as he had often seen in the aged monasteries of remote European recesses. His mission to ask secrecy of a Jesuit priest added a touch of medievalism, which gave the Englishman an uncomfortably foolish feeling, but did not deter him from its execution.

As might be expected, Father Vincent promptly gave assurances of his caution, both in the past and for the future; after receiving which, Montresor essayed to learn whether the priest believed Robinson and MacManus were members of any Fenian organization.

I could never obtain a very explicit account of this part of the conversation, but its general character has formed a decidedly clear impression upon my mind. This shows Father Vincent, anxious, on one hand, either as man or priest, to guard the confi-

dence or secrets of the two Irishmen, and, on the other, feeling it his duty to avoid leaving Montresor in the dark to an extent which might injure him, and managing, with consummate skill, to give a definite picture, without any details. In my fancy, I hear this trained dialectician, of gentle voice, and with absolute command of the English language, from the purely colloquial to the most scholarly, so guiding the conversation as, practically, to make it a monologue, and, at the same time, convincing the other that this very thing was being done by himself. To baffle without betraying, to unveil Truth's form without exposing her nakedness, is a difficult but not impossible task.

At one time, in order to light a cigarette, Montresor struck a match, and Father Vincent's face, thus suddenly illumined, was looking at him with the same intent but confident expression he had often seen upon it as some important move in chess was impending; and this seemed to me an unconsciously graphic illustration of what was taking place.

When the Englishman left, he had certain definite convictions, although he could give no precise reasons for them. He was firmly persuaded that Robinson was in secret touch with the Fenians; that he used this connection, and the fact of his being a Catholic, for his own personal advantage, which species of disloyalty had caused his estrangement from MacManus; and that, by reason of this, the latter could be depended upon in the investigation for Lady Broadlands, even if he were not the faithful and honest man he seemed to be. In addition, the juxtaposition of names, and certain abstract sentiments, conveyed to Montresor strong confirmation



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of his theory that Robinson was associated in some way with the American claimants.

These things floated through his mind as he drove back in the darkness ; and, at first inchoate, gradually assumed shape, joined themselves with other facts, and finally presented a consistent theory.

Regarded from every point of view, Robinson seemed to be a man who would stop at nothing which might be to his advantage, and it was to be expected that, having failed in getting the title bill passed, he would now try every other device to hamper an investigation which might be the means of discovering fraudulent work of his client, or perhaps of himself. He had, in their earlier conversations on the ship, told Montresor of the deceptive character of coal lands, and had often mentioned his own success in investigating titles in America, the former being probably meant to discourage defense of the Broadlands title, and the latter tentatively hazarded in the hope of being employed by their lawyers to conduct a search, which he would take care should prove futile. The suit itself had not been mentioned to him, nor, indeed, to any one on shipboard ; but the effort to trace Black was no secret in legal circles, and might easily, in that manner, have come to the knowledge of a lawyer, especially if he was covertly interested on the other side. Had Montresor gone overboard that night during the storm, how much it would have simplified matters for Robinson, who could scarcely have felt deep regret at the fact that it was his own suggestion regarding the fascination of a midnight tempest which led to such a result. But if that had truly been his intention, it would have been murder ! Be it so—is not the seed of



murder, as of all other sins, in every heart, awaiting only a suitable environment to germinate and bear fruit? What adult can say that there never has been a person whose failure longer to exist would not produce some feeling of cordial acquiescence in the decrees of Providence? To advance from passive sanction to active assistance, and then to independent initiative, are simply steps which may or may not be taken, according to the strength of one's passion on one hand, and on the other the reasons for restraint, such as religious belief—"the fear o' hell"—or the "hangman's whip" itself.

That there was sufficient motive in the prospective gain of a large fortune to make Robinson commit, or at least instigate, a crime, seemed reasonably certain. It needed little acquaintance with him to perceive that the acquisition of money was his main object in life, in the pursuit of which he showed the same combination of hard exaction and cool calculation of apparently desperate chances which made him a dangerous adversary at cards. But such a temperament is not so exceptional in this age as to require much special analysis.

If money was "the root of all evil" in the primitive life of the Bible, how much deeper is that root now, when it draws its sustenance from worlds then undreamed of, and nourishes a voluptuously exuberant growth, compared to which the luxury of Solomon, in all his glory, was but a starved and shriveled flower upon a sandy plain. Kings humbly beg it of their subjects, who in turn receive it back again in bribes; nations cannot make a war, nor obtain peace; preachers cannot preach, nor their flocks hear them, without it;—and, while the destitute man lives

a more squalid life than Lazarus, he that is even moderately rich can revel in varied sensual enjoyment which would make Dives seem like an ascetic. The French have the proverb "*Cherchez la femme*"; but even in France the vast majority of crimes have their origin in money.

Undoubtedly, Robinson had motive enough to cause his instigation of the murder, probably selecting as his agent a Fenian who had been told it would be of service to their cause. That a man could be willing to murder another without any definite offense being proved against him became less difficult for Montresor to believe, not only by reason of the recent murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish, but still more by the official account of the Molly McGuire trials in Pennsylvania, which he had been reading. The story of the detective whose testimony broke up this desperate band was more thrilling than any romance. He had joined the association, learned their bloody secrets, and finally, when they suspected him, had boldly sought and faced his accusers in a lonely mountain hut, by this act of supreme courage saving his life; for these men, although accustomed to great hazards themselves, did not dream that a guilty man would dare to place his life so completely in their hands. But it was not this which made the greatest impression upon Montresor, nor even the long list of organized crimes, reminding one of the days of the Holy Vehme, but it was the absolute impersonality displayed by the man selected to commit a murder. He in no case cared to satisfy himself that the intended victim had really committed an offense against the society; and if he happened to be feeling unwell, or occupied by household duties,

would pass "the job" on to any member chancing to drop in for a friendly chat, who, in turn, would accept and perform it with cheery neighborliness. Upon the whole, it did not seem that Robinson needed to do more than give a hint to any fellow-member of a secret organization in order to have his aid in being rid of an objectionable man—especially if the chances of concealment were favorable.

These chances were ideal in Montresor's own case; for, as long as he had not been thrown overboard, his assailant could pretend that he was only having a bit of fun; while, if the crime had been successful, he could say he merely attempted to prevent suicide—just such an incident had lately been reported in the newspapers, without any one doubting the explanation. Moreover, he realized that he himself could never have come back to accuse; that, once in the sea upon that terrific night, he would have been a dead man who told no tales. In such a gale the steamer would not have stopped an instant, as has been well evinced lately, when an English captain saw his only son washed overboard, yet could not pause, but went on in the devouring gloom battling for the lives of strangers.

Montresor could well picture his fate: after the mad plunge into the water and a struggle to its surface, he would have seen towering above him, for a moment, a huge black shape, with a single, feebly blinking, yellow eye, like some Cyclopean monster, and then it would have vanished into that sullen outer darkness, leaving him in a vast, desolate, and soundless ante-chamber of Death.

Yes; all the elements for crime were there—the motive, the temperament, the agent, and the means

of concealment. Although this sequence of reasoning may not appear satisfactory to others, it became so to Montresor at that time; for the truth is that his fondness for Katherine had found its opposite focus in a dislike of Robinson, and his revolving thoughts drew all other persons or events within the elliptical orbit thus formed. But however convinced he was of the correctness of his theory, being of good physical courage, he gave no outward sign of it, even when there was further confirmation in an unexpected incident.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A COLONIAL MANOR HOUSE AND BEATRIX PRESTON

WITH such sentiments toward Robinson, it was a relief to Montresor that he had an engagement to make a week-end visit to Mr. Ridgeway at his country place in Maryland.

Quite a large party had grown out of a simple invitation to Montresor to come down for some quail-shooting. Ridgeway added, apparently as an after-thought, that he would also ask a young Member of Congress from Mississippi, who was one of the best shots, over a dog, in the country.

When Miss Thompson, in a sudden fit of flippancy, taxed him with being a woman-hater and never inviting her sex to "that wonderful old place," he had forthwith made a regular house-party of it. He would not give it that name, however, saying a Southern gentleman's house was open to his friends every day of the year, including leap year, and it depended, therefore, solely upon them whether he should have many guests or none.

"Why, often in my father's time," he said, "when I was a boy, I have seen it that one day only the family would sit down to dinner, and the next day there would be as many as fifteen."

"How many were there in your family?" Miss Thompson asked.

"Why, there were fourteen of us," replied Mr.

Ridgeway, glad to get off one of his favorite jokes. "But," he added, "two were cousins and one was a friend who always lived with us. The friend was a great chum of my grandmother, who came to spend a night, but has stayed with us fifty years; you will meet her when you come down to us." (As Mr. Ridgeway was a widower, without children, this use of the plural showed how the friend was, indeed, one of the family.) "Three generations of us have loved her as if she were blood kin, and I'm sure you will all like her. Upon other days I've seen the number suddenly jump to thirty—most of them a day or two ahead of their letters tellin' us they were comin'; for in those days we had mails only twice a week, and mighty slow and uncertain, at that—no telegraph at all, thank the Lord!"

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Ridgeway, your friends would just invite themselves?" asked Miss Thompson, oblivious of the fact that she had rather taken the initiative in her own invitation.

The Southerner seemed still more unconscious, as he answered:

"That's the way we like best to have them come, ma'am. It shows they come because they want to see us, and not because——"

"*You* want to see them," interposed Miss Thompson, noting a chance of making a point. It was lost upon Mr. Ridgeway, who continued, seriously:

"——because we had invited them and they thought it would not be polite to refuse. Our friends would come, and often they would bring their friends. You know the French say: '*Les amis de nos amis sont nos amis.*' Well, that's what we say, ma'am, and what we mean."

"But," said a practical-minded woman who was present, "you must have had a good market near you to provide for so many people, all coming suddenly upon you."

"Oh! We were self-supportin' in those days, and all it meant was to take down an extra ham from the smokehouse, a few more terrapin from the pen, kill a fatted calf or sheep, and go shoot some more quail or snipe."

"Wouldn't it have been simpler," asked Montresor, "to have shot some of the superfluous friends?"

"I must confess," laughed Ridgeway, "we did that, too, in those days; but it was generally to decide which one of us was superfluous, as far as some lady was concerned—not because we grudged one another a hearty meal and a bottle of wine."

"Forewarned is forearmed," said Montresor. "We shall all be careful not to let our superfluous persons come too near the beauty to whom you throw your handkerchief. Miss Thompson will understand, I hope, why she doesn't have her usual circle of admirers."

Miss Thompson laughed and seemed pleased with the persiflage; but Mr. Ridgeway, who held the duty of hospitality in constant reverence, deprecated the suggestion that he might, while host, show preference, and therefore answered, with grave courtesy:

"When under my roof, all ladies are to me equally beautiful."

"That does complicate matters," responded Montresor, determined not to be serious. "So we men shall have to forego female society, which you don't permit, and console ourselves with high eating and deep drinking, which you do."

Again Mr. Ridgeway was on the alert in his character as host, and solicitous that his guests should not have expectations doomed to disappointment.

"Well," he said, "as to the drinkin', I can give you some Madeira that my great-grandfather put in about a hundred years ago, and some whiskey just about as old; but when it comes to eatin', you'll have to put up with a darky's cookin'. You see," he added, apologetically, "with us at the South, the right to be coachman, valet, butler, and cook descends in certain families of what used to be our slaves, just as the right to bear the king's cup or hold his hat does in your country; and I would no more dare to turn out Aunt Venus and put in a modern chef than to take down my grandfather's portrait and hang up a copy of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. I have sometimes thought, for the sake of my nephew, who will get the place when I die, of bringin' about an alliance between Lucretia—that's Aunt Venus' daughter—and a French chef, which, in time, might produce a compromise between the two styles of cookin'; but in that case I would have to give up all thought of bein' sent back to Congress."

"And serve you quite right, too," said Senator Ronderson, who had remained silent in the group much longer than his wont. "The truth is, Montresor, you will eat more than you ever did in your life, and it will take strong horses—or Miss Thompson—to drag you away from the table. If you do any shooting—which I doubt—you will have to be taken about on a litter."

It would never have occurred to Mr. Ridgeway



to invite special members of a family, omitting the others, except where it was a stag party; so that a day or two afterward Mrs. Thompson received a note from Miss Preston—whom she assumed was the old lady friend—in a fine, old-fashioned, but firm, handwriting, upon very thin paper, in old-time courteous phrase, begging that she might add her own entreaties, although of such slight value or importance, to those of Mr. Ridgeway, praying that any members of her family to whom it might seem agreeable, or any friends who were with them, would “honour” Sudley with a visit. She said she was distressed and dismayed to learn they contemplated a sojourn of only five days; but, trusting rather in their kindness of heart than to the attractions of any entertainment which could be offered, she hoped they might be over-persuaded to remain longer. She regretted that the absence of leaves from the trees would detract from the appearance of the place, but was right sure the gentlemen would be consoled by the fact that quail were “most plentiful.”

Montresor was shown the letter on the train by Thompson, who said:

“Ain’t it funny having this long, highfalutin’ invitation from a woman who, as near as I can make out, is nothing more than a genteel housekeeper. Then, look at her spelling—‘plentiful’ with two l’s.”

“That,” responded Montresor, “is merely sympathetic spelling. How could one be meager with such a word! I am sure their hospitality is of the same nature, full to overflowing.”

“And she spells ‘honor’ with a ‘u,’” continued Thompson.

"I must confess," said Montresor, "that I spell it the same way, although by this time I ought to know better."

Thompson perceived no sarcasm in this utterance, but took it as evincing an amiable appreciation of his importance, never before shown by Montresor, whose enjoyment, however, was not thereby lessened, nor by the fact that, as they sat together, there were no other auditors. His keen relish of the absurd was sufficiently satisfied by a silent study of this inflated peddler lecturing a stately old lady of the *ancien régime*.

The only members of the party besides these two were Senator Ronderson and the German Secretary of Legation, as all the others had gone in the morning. After a rumbling journey of several hours, consisting mostly of long stops at lonely stations and leisurely conversations between the agents' families and the conductor, they reached their destined station, and were not long in starting for Sudley.

The straight-bodied open trap sent to meet them was driven by a negro coachman, who wore a weatherbeaten livery and a hat of an age affording full excuse for its unbrushed condition, as even the most gentle stroke would savor of brutality. Two other "darkies," by their likeness to the coachman, evidently his son and grandson, had charge of a light wagon for the luggage. They were dressed in cloth of a peculiar hard brownish-gray, typical of their class in lower Maryland, with soft, pointed hats, and so spattered from head to foot with the red clay of that region that they looked as if a very little baking would convert them into brittle terra-cotta fig-

ures. The son's soubriquet, "Little Peter," still clung to him, although he was six feet four and towered nearly a foot above his father, while the grandson had the nickname "Bunnie."

They drove at a fairly smart pace over a road clinging and heavy with that same clay, drawn by a pair of horses whose slender legs and gameness showed them to be thoroughbreds. Deepening twilight was closing a gray, raw, typical February day, and the party found the exhilaration with which they had at first taken long draughts of the fresh country air slowly gave place to a realization that damp cold was of an unemotional nature. During the latter part of their drive the road ran through an irregular gorge which was scarcely ever penetrated by the low-ranging winter sun; and, while the dank odor of vegetation, in slow and chilly decay, assailed one sense, the sound of a brook which ran beside them degenerated from a dreamy gurgle, reminiscent of languorous summer, into a vulgar wet splash, becoming more and more inopportune and brutal.

"Whew!" exclaimed the Senator, "I'm chilled through and through. I couldn't for the life of me tell which is flesh and which is bone—whether one of my feet is on the other or on Thompson's, or perhaps he has several of his on some of mine. And there's that blamed stream following us up wherever we go. I'll bet dollars to doughnuts we get into it before we're through. But, as the French say, I'd give my inmost soul, or even my Long Session vote, for a drink. Has anybody got anything?"

The only one to answer was the German, who said:

"I haf two bottle of Liebfraumilch\* in my trunk, of seventy-four."

"Great heavens, man!" exclaimed the Senator, emphatically, "you might as well tell me you have two freezers of virginal ice-cream in Washington. Even if we had the bottles right here, they would not suit *my* case. I need some liquor with a grip to it."

The German laughed good-naturedly, and questioned:

"But you would rather good Rheinisch wine haf than bad whiskey—is it not so?"

"Bad whiskey!" ejaculated the Senator. "Don't you know, as Ben Wade, one of our most celebrated public men once said, there's no such thing as *bad* whiskey; some whiskeys are better than others—that is all!"

"It may soothe you, Senator," said Montresor, "to know, as Donelly explained to me once, that it is bad to drink any alcohol while you are exposed to cold. It makes the blood circulate more rapidly and causes it to come to the surface of the body, where it is more quickly chilled than otherwise."

"That's theory on Donelly's part," said the Senator. "He never verified it experimentally. If he were along, and we had any whiskey, I should hate to let him have the first swig at it, unless the flask were a very big one. Uncle Peter, why did you let Little Peter get ahead of us with the baggage-wagon? Don't you think you could overtake them?"

"No, sah," responded the coachman, "it's puf-

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\*"Milk of the Holy Virgin"—so called from a legend that the grapes producing the wine sprang from a spot where some milk dropped, as she was nursing the Saviour.

feckly ompossible; 'cause Mas' George promise Lil' Peter and Bunnie dat if dey didn't have dem trunks home and up in de bedchambers 'fore you gemmen dat Lil' Peter would get the biggest lickin' I was able to perwide, an' Bunnie, he would get de bes' dressin' down dat Lil' Peter had strength given him to serply. An' though dem niggahs, bof of 'em, certainly deserves extra good lickin's ebry day I'se been acquainted wid 'em, I suspicions dat dis perticular lickin' deyse agreed to pass it on to de hosses. No, sah! I'se mighty sorry, but we can't obertake dat whiskey de gemmen left."

This burst of loquacity was a revelation to Montresor, who was ignorant of that characteristic of the Southern house-servant which makes him silent until spoken to, but then permits an unlimited reply.

Then the joking flagged, and the men puffed at their cigars industriously in silence, broken only by the question: "How far is it now, Uncle Peter?" which, during the whole journey, received the invariable answer: "'Tain't so far now, sah."

Finally they gave up even this, and, settling down grimly into their seats and giving a last futile tug at the light lap-robcs, resigned themselves to the idea that they might drive on all night, or until they lost consciousness. Seemingly encouraged by their silence, the cold found new crevices for access and, with assured deliberation, adjusted its rigid manacles upon them. As if in the conspiracy, the horses slowed down into a tiresome walk up a steep hill; while the half light of the valley, instead of brightening as they mounted, became complete darkness in the dense wood through which they now passed.

Then the road made a sudden turn, and, emerging

from the wood, they found themselves before a large double gate, one-half of which was open, while the other half showed, in the reawakened twilight, a pattern of beautiful lace-work wrought in iron. Beyond, at the end of a straight avenue of pine trees, the same softened light showed the simple, symmetrical outlines of a Colonial manor house, from which the glow of many lights gave such luxurious suggestion that, coming unexpectedly, it looked as if it were the fabric of some beneficent enchantment.

The horses, passing rapidly through the avenue, which debouched before a broad lawn, swung around a circle, past an old-fashioned box-hedged garden, and drew up before an ample portico, whose roof was supported at the height of two stories by six white columns, which, although terminating in curled volutes of the Ionic order, had the slender grace of the Corinthian.

As Montresor stiffly descended, he barely had time to notice the great door (typically Colonial, with its semi-elliptical transom of delicate tracery), when it was thrown wide open; and, in a hall which, even to his English eyes, appeared large, he saw Ridgeway coming forward to welcome them, while a great fire roared and crackled in a capacious chimney at the back. Moreover, he could, from where he stood, look through a window into the drawing-room and catch a brief glimpse of a charmingly pretty girl, in evening dress of almost quaint simplicity, holding a glass, which he inferred had been filled from a steaming punch-bowl near at hand, and in such dangerous proximity to a pair of roguish, rosy lips that he wondered if it touched them—or was she only taking a dainty sniff of the fragrant fumes?

After the darkness, chill, and forced abstinence, this Bacchante was, indeed, a seductive vision.

Mr. Ridgeway, meeting his guests as they alighted, herded them rapidly into the hall, and, insisting they must have a "warming-up" before going to their rooms, ushered the Englishman, who was the first to be rid of his great-coat, into the drawing-room, where he said:

"Beatrix, let me present Mr. Montresor, who is almost frozen. This, Montresor, is my niece, Miss Preston."

And there before him stood, not the old lady whom, from her letter, he had pictured Beatrix Preston, but the smiling "Bacchante of the Window," as in his mind he had christened her. Her face, framed in rippling, curling hair of a burnished, golden red, had the delicate pink-and-white, the ready dimples and half-parted lips of a child, while her large, gray eyes looked into his with the same simple fearlessness. Although her dainty and rounded figure was that of a woman, her small stature and old-fashioned, high-waisted gown, which clung to her shapely hips without the awkward bustle of the day, made her seem some prankish madcap in her grandmother's "best." In keeping with this was a certain demure primness which added a fascinating piquancy.

She started to make a curtsy, and then, evidently remembering herself, stiffened and put out a rigid arm—which was the latest fashion—with a warm, confiding little hand at the end of it—which was not the latest fashion.

"Mr. Montresor," said she, "it gives me the greatest satisfaction to bid you welcome to Sudley. I

much fear you have had but a cold drive over here. May I offer you a glass of hot apple-toddy? It is a drink we old Virginians esteem most highly."

As we know, Montresor was not in a condition to be hypercritical as to a warming and invigorating draught; but, surely, neither the aromatic vapor which arose from the cup, nor its lovely bearer, created an atmosphere of repulsion. As he drank he felt the warm, life-giving principle course through his veins, with a stinging, resistless thrill, driving before it all numbness and restoring a supple alertness of mind and body, as well as a keen appreciation of the actual pleasantness to be found in light, warmth, and beauty.

"Do you approve of it?" asked Miss Preston, gravely, although, perhaps, unnecessarily.

"I could understand," responded Montresor, "the Americans fighting over this, but not over a lot of old maid's tea."

Sagely, but with a quick gleam in her eyes and flitting dimples on her cheeks, she remarked:

"I can assure you, Mr. Montresor, there has been more quarreling and fighting over *this* delicious beverage than ever there was over *tea*, which, as the poet says, 'neither cheers nor inebriates.' But you must excuse me a moment while I welcome our other guests."

Starting forward with the same free, longish stride that English girls have—which comes from country life—she suddenly changed to the more formal and gliding motion which we associate with drawing-room dames in the days of the minuet. Again, as she greeted Senator Ronderson, she gave the involuntary half-curtsey, and again correcting



herself, with her right arm stiffly extended, she shook hands with him, while she still retained hold of her skirt with her left hand, its little finger pointing helplessly out into the air.

As her lips moved, Montresor could imagine the gravely courteous little speech of welcome she was making, and the beaming smile of the Senator confirmed him in this fancy.

Mrs. Thompson, Miss Thompson, and a Boston girl related to them each gave Montresor a quick but cordial nod as they hurried forward with glasses of apple-toddy for the other men of the arriving party; but, as he noticed a flashing glance in his direction from Miss Preston, he did not join them, going, instead, toward the bowl of toddy, where, having refilled his own glass, he provided another for his fair entertainer and awaited her coming. Since each of the other men, as soon as he was presented with his glass, naturally engaged in conversation with the donor, it left Miss Preston free, when she again looked over her shoulder and saw Montresor alone, to move toward him; observing which, he advanced to meet her, bearing in his hands both glasses of toddy.

"Miss Preston," he said, "will you not honor me by joining me in a glass of this nectar? I have heard from my host that in the South it is risking certain death to refuse to drink when invited."

"Let me tell you, Mr. Montresor," she said, "it would be certain death to me if I drank all of that glass; so you only offer me a choice of deaths. But my duty as hostess bids me join you as far as I dare." Then, taking the glass, with a smile that

seemed promisingly fearless: "And what shall our toast be, Mr. Montresor?"

Was this a piece of coquetry, uttered with such childish, grave innocence? It was impossible to say. But Montresor's answer was inevitable:

"Surely, Miss Preston, there can be but one toast—the health of our host's gracious niece!"

"Oh, but, Mr. Montresor, I could not join in a toast to myself. Let me provide one—one you cannot refuse—to the lady of your heart's choice."

"Are you sure," asked Montresor, audaciously, "you would be able to join in that toast?"

Beatrix's face and neck flushed, and once more the dimples fluttered upon her cheeks; but her answer was given with sedate sweetness:

"Surely the woman you have chosen for loyal homage must be worthy of much more than such a simple courtesy on the part of poor me."

The sudden change from the bitter cold and darkness outside to so much that was bright and graceful—aided, perhaps, to be perfectly truthful, by an atmosphere accompanying the toddy—had made it seem to Montresor that he was in a world apart, or upon an enchanted island, in the midst of a gently heaving, soundless sea of oblivion, and this sweet-spoken, artless maiden another Miranda. But the words of her toast brought him back to the reality that his heart's choice was Katherine, whether she were worthy or, as seemed now so certain, unworthy. And, although he strove to give his voice a tone of flirtatious badinage, there was an indefinable stress of emotion in it as he replied:

"Let us drink, rather, to that gracious one who will deign to *accept* my earnest devotion."

"That, Mr. Montresor," retorted, calmly, Miss Preston, "is *my* toast in other words. A mere echo, or a redundancy, without excuse in rhetoric. But, since we are agreed, let us drink to her, and a long life to you both."

Upon this she gayly clinked her glass with his, and then quaffed boldly. As she did so, she looked full and steadily at Montresor over her glass; and, as his eyes met hers, he thought he saw a vague divination of his secret, and a confidently tender sympathy for him.

Moved by this, or by a loss for something to say, or because he liked the drink, Montresor, as he filled his glass again, said:

"What would you think of my appreciation of the wine of your country if I took a third glass?"

Her face showing undisguised alarm, she laid a light, hesitating touch upon his arm, and said, frankly, energetically:

"Mr. Montresor, if you do, you will be positively drunk?"

She certainly wished to restrain him from the naughty act, and yet—her face shone and her plump shoulders were contracted in a shiver of excitement, while from her wide-open eyes there gleamed a curiosity which I would call unhealthy, had it not been so palpably strong and active.

The frank utterance of the word "drunk" from such lips, more than the prediction itself, so staggered Montresor that he put down his glass, saying:

"To show you my high regard for your opinion, I at once give up this third glass, which might have completely restored my life."

Whether moved by his eloquent appeal, or her

youthful tendency to experiment, her next remark tended to start Montresor anew upon the downward path:

"Even my brother George, *who has a very strong head*, says a gentleman ought not to take more than two of these glasses at a time."

"And does he never do it?" asked Montresor, taking up his glass again and sipping at it.

"Well, I must confess, sir," was the reply, "you question one as deeply as a lawyer. How should I know? We Virginians never count the glasses of our own family, only those of our guests." She ended with a merry laugh at the notion that she had prevented Montresor from making such a retort.

"I was only wondering," said he, "how he formed a theory so exact in its enunciation."

Her face quickly assumed its serene expression, although the mischief still sparkled in her eyes, as she said:

"Oh, Mr. Montresor, you should not wonder at anything. That is what my father is continually quoting to me from an ode of Horace's with which you must be acquainted—'*Nil admirari*' is the utmost I can remember."

"It is the best of philosophy," answered Montresor, sipping boldly, and gazing with growing interest at this subtle maiden.

The process was, however, interrupted by the approach of the other ladies, accompanied by Senator Ronderson.

"Montresor," said the latter, "we have come to drag you from this insidious bowl." Whereupon he proceeded to fill his own glass and drink it off heartily.

"We were also sent," said Miss Thompson, "to let you know that dinner would be at *half-past six*." This was uttered with a look and tone which said plainly to all, except, apparently, to Miss Preston: "Did you ever hear of such a barbarous hour?"

"Only," explained their young hostess, "we do not call it dinner, although I think you will find it every bit as substantial. You see," she said, earnestly, "Uncle George found that if he called it dinner Aunt Venus became so confused that everything was served either raw or burned up; so he employed a little stratagem and calls it supper, but he gradually added things until it seems like a dinner. With us, we still have our dinner at four o'clock, which was the hour my grandfather had it."

"And don't you find it awfully inconvenient now?" said Miss Thompson, patronizingly.

"After such a long trial?" asked Miss Preston, smiling guilelessly. "Surely not. Either the hour must suit us, or we have learned to suit the hour. And at what hour did *your* grandfather dine, Miss Thompson?"

"Any hour of the day or night he could get it," muttered the Senator, as Montresor and he moved off to dress.

They could hear no response from Miss Thompson; but her mother interjected:

"We must not detain Miss Preston with our chatter. She, no doubt, has household duties calling her."

"I should like," said the Senator, "to hear what the little Virginian said to that. Those women won't get much out of her by their patronizing ways. And

no one will ever know whether she is conscious of it."

Although the Boston girl had not said anything, her manner showed that she, as well as the Thompsons, looked down upon their young hostess. The cause of this was principally her "dowdy dressing." Her first offense had been when she had ridden to the station to meet them, attired in a long-skirted habit, such as were worn in the days of our grandmothers, and a three-cornered hat with a lace cockade, which, with her hair braided and caught in a loop behind with a broad, black bow, was undeniably becoming, but far from smart. None of them really knew enough about horses to recognize her superb riding, as she controlled a mettlesome thoroughbred, which went off as quietly for her as a Shetland pony. "Isn't she queer!" had exclaimed one of the party, as soon as they were alone in the old-fashioned coach which had been sent for them. They may have experienced some degree of compunction in applying such an utterly damning epithet to the niece of their host, but her dress and her equally old-fashioned little speech of greeting made the strain upon them too great. When, upon their noticing the absence of gas at Sudley, she told them that, until two days before, she had never seen gas, later appearing in a gray poplin gown, which she had changed for a lavender evening one, both equally old-fashioned, nothing more could be said. Indeed, they felt much complacent self-approbation at restraining their inevitable scorn within such bounds as to leave its object absolutely oblivious.

Shortly before the Revolution, Beatrix Preston's great-great-grandfather, a distant cousin of Henry

Esmond, had established himself upon a grant of land given him near the Blue Ridge Mountains; and there the life led by five generations of Prestons had been precisely the same. The men had hunted and shot, dined at four, read more or *less*—always preserving sufficient Latin to quote Horace—and played cards. The women had hunted, looked after their gardens, kept house, read, played cards, and made wonderful compositions of needlework or wax flowers. There had been many long and distant visits to their neighbors, and the later generations had gone to the Greenbrier White Sulphur Springs, accompanied by numerous servants, leading horses, and cutting down small trees to drag behind their coaches, in lieu of a brake, while descending the mountains. Beatrix's grandfather had once or twice gone to a simple little town on the Rhode Island coast called Newport, to be with some cousins from South Carolina, who, with other cotton planters, sailed there upon the vessels which bore their crops to the spinners of Providence. Some had gone abroad for a grand tour to England or Paris, and in the latter place were disappointed to find that the French they had studied at home did not seem to be spoken.

Beatrix was born just after the American Civil War; and while Afton Hall, as their place was called, lay too remote to be laid waste by war, yet one stroke of Lincoln's pen had, by freeing the slaves, converted Mr. Preston from a rich man to a poor one. With his best management, which was not very good so far as bargaining was concerned, he was just able to send his son to the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, pay the widow of a pro-

fessor of mathematics—and French—at William and Mary College to teach his daughter, and keep up a pack of hounds. Of course, he always had twice as much to eat and drink on his table as was needed, but that was a necessity of life.

So, beyond an occasional trip to Lexington—a half day's journey distant—Beatrix had not left Afton Hall in all her life until this present visit to her Uncle George. Her father meant, in the following summer, when she would be nineteen, to take her to the White Sulphur Springs, or to the "White," as he familiarly clipped it, and resolved to save money for the purpose—that is, he resolved to take her and save up afterward.

As there was no girl of her own age among their neighbors, with whom they visited, Beatrix had for companionship, a large part of the time, her grandmother, who, a great belle in 1830, had never lost her charming vivacity and tender, even romantic, interest in life. But the tales she told so interestingly belonged almost wholly to the period of her own youth, and she impressed upon her eagerly listening granddaughter the view of life which then prevailed. In manners, reading, music, accomplishments, and even fashions, Beatrix gradually formed conceptions which, in a lady of quality, would have been absolutely smart fifty years before, but were utterly out of joint with the times in which she lived. The prominence of her family, which, in that old-fashioned neighborhood, no degree of poverty could diminish, prevented such an air of criticism as would show to her naturally clear intelligence that she was out of drawing. Her father and brother were aware of it, but rather liked it, the former because it re-



mind him of his childish days, and the latter because it helped to make her unlike "other girls," for whom he had the college boy's light opinion. Her Uncle George was very fond of her, and not only intended to contribute to the White Sulphur trip, but meant to supplement it by taking a house in Washington for the next winter and giving her a season there. When this party had formed itself, thinking he could give her an advanced taste of modern society, he dispatched a letter which had been forwarded by special messenger from Lexington. Miss Fairfax, his old lady friend, having been taken ill, Beatrix found herself in charge of the house, which, being a capable young woman, and accustomed to perform the same duty for her father, gave her little concern.

When Mrs. Thompson suggested that the young hostess was being detained from her household duties, the answer came sweetly:

"Oh, not in the least, I assure you. Having timely notice of the pleasure of your company, we have already given the necessary orders. The only thing remaining to be done is for the gentlemen to change their clothes, in which my assistance is not needed. Judging, however, from your speech, that you will pardon the discourtesy of my leaving you, after you have assembled in the parlor I will, with your permission, go for a moment to see how Miss Fairfax is doing."

To do her justice, Mrs. Thompson felt the delicate reproof of her attempt to dismiss her young hostess, and endeavored to make amends for it by following her to make inquiries and send a message to the invalid. This brought them together out in the

hall, where they were met by a darky maid, who said:

"Miss Trixie, de gemman what you said was to go in de Blue Chamber seem mighty *surprised* dat dis lady's clo's was in dere, and said dere mus' be some mistake, and wanted me to give him anodder room; but I tol' him we couldn't do it widout de lady's consent."

Miss Preston blushed furiously; but, retaining perfect control of herself, said, with unruffled voice:

"Oh, Mrs. Thompson, I cannot tell you how great is my mortification. Mercury, my uncle's body-servant, must have shown one of the other gentlemen to the Blue Chamber instead of Mr. Thompson. How *fortunate* that *you* were not in it at the time."

"Dere's de gemman he-se'f waitin' wid Mercury up in de gallery," interposed the maid.

As in many other Colonial houses, the staircase ascended to a gallery which, running around three sides of the hall, opened into various passages leading to the bedrooms. On this could be seen Mercury, with apologetic, perplexed face, holding in his hand a Bond Street dressing-bag, and beside him Thompson, puffed up with outraged importance. Not far distant, Montresor, by an acoustic freak of the hall, could hear the conversation perfectly.

When the maid's speech rendered it evident that it was Thompson himself who had objected to occupying the same room as his wife, a look of pain and commiseration came upon Beatrix's face; and, to save Mrs. Thompson from embarrassment at this exposure of strained marital relations, she said:

"How exceedingly stupid of me! I should have remembered that your husband would be getting up

early for shootin' and huntin'—perhaps, and, of course, he doesn't wish to disturb you."

The fact was that Thompson had never shot anything in his life, and, as Beatrix's "huntin'—*perhaps*" had indicated, his fat body and short legs did not encourage riding; but Mrs. Thompson did not combat the explanation offered, although her poor opinion of a girl who knew so little of the habits of smart society was obvious. So, with a resumption of her patronizing manner, she said:

"Yes, I would be glad if you would be kind enough to give us separate rooms, and, although the room you have given me is so splendid and large, I know that, as your uncle said there were twenty rooms with a bath, you won't mind if I ask you to move me into one of them."

Beatrix broke into a merry laugh, which she almost immediately restrained into a tone of regret at being unable to gratify the wish of a guest.

"*That*, Mrs. Thompson," said she, "is one of Uncle George's jokes. I'm so sorry he did not explain to you. What he meant was that one may have a bath in every room in the house—that is, every bedroom. There isn't a room just for bathing in the house. But I will send you the bathtub of Uncle George's grandfather, who was very fat and had it made especially large."

Mrs. Thompson could not, or did not, restrain a look of surprise and discontent; which was strange, as in a large part of this country the daily bath for adults was a comparatively recent fad, and, indeed, in her own family it had superseded the "Saturday night bath" only after a visit to England, and in-

stallation into their new house, which "had a bathroom in every suite."

At this point Ridgeway came out upon the gallery and offered to accompany Montresor to his room, so the latter heard no more of the colloquy; but the last sight of Miss Preston showed a serene, undaunted face, and he felt sure that, as the Senator had expressed it, Mrs. Thompson "would not get much out of her." And his heart warmed with admiration toward the gallant little woman.

## CHAPTER XV

### WAS IT AN ACCIDENT?

MONTRESOR had not long been engaged in the process of dressing for dinner before he began to appreciate Miss Preston's sagacity in seeking to restrain him from frequent draughts of toddy. For, to his dismay, he felt that thickening of the atmosphere and capricious focussing of sounds which is a warning signal against further drinking. He found it truly, as Senator Ronderson called it, "insidious," for its effects continued to grow until, when he was again in the drawing-room, he fancied others were noticing his great care in movement and speech. No one did, however, except Miss Preston, who glanced at him with anxious curiosity.

The fact that he had taken himself well in hand prevented his showing any disagreeable surprise at seeing Robinson come forward to speak to him. And, although he had fancied one of the chief pleasures of the visit would be the avoidance of this man, he now realized his presence was not such a great matter. By a strange paradox Robinson seemed more incidental, more of a negligible detail, here in this country house than in the capital of the country. Was it the Virginia maiden or the Virginia toddy that gave Montresor a buoyancy, an illogical feeling of supremacy over fate? Or was it an unacknowl-

edged feeling of gratification that Robinson's absence from Washington prevented his contact with Katherine Rae, smirching her with his mercenary intrigues?

Just before going into the dining-room Miss Preston said to the Senator and Montresor:

"If you gentlemen will be advised by me, and wish to enjoy something in absolute perfection, you will reserve somewhat of your appetite for both food and drink until my Uncle George prepares the terrapin in a chafing-dish and puts into it his famous old Madeira. With it, you also drink as much as is pleasant—or seems wise—of the same wine."

"Miss Preston," responded the Senator, "I have several times tasted terrapin prepared by your uncle, and can testify it is worth crossing the ocean for; but, as to drinking as much of the Madeira 'as seems wise,' I have no confidence in my own judgment. It would be much better if some other person judged how much was wise for me."

The advice given by his hostess, with placid impersonality, seemed to Montresor singularly opportune, especially as it supplied him with an excuse for the abstemiousness upon which he had already resolved.

The dining-room, with its symmetrical furnishing, gave a perfect example of that graceful simplicity which was the joint product of high aspirations, implanted in the colonists by the works of Inigo Jones and Van Brugh, and those technical limitations which prevented over-elaboration. Upon the sideboard were cold meats, decanters, and much silver, while upon the table were more decanters, narrow-necked pitchers of claret, and in the center a

tall silver *épergne* representing a tree, with spreading branches, supporting a vase filled with flowers, and at its root a group of tipsy Bacchants, plucking grapes from a vine which clambered up the trunk.

Then came the meal itself, the dishes, covered, being borne in from an outside kitchen by numerous, and not noiseless, darkies. There were oysters from the neighboring bay, oyster-crab soup—called a “stew,” to spare the feelings of Aunt Venus—Taylor fish, fried chicken with a delicious cream sauce, roast turkey, and hot ham of a flavor superior to the famous Smithfield ones, canvas-back ducks, and, finally, the terrapin, placed in a chafing-dish before Mr. Ridgeway, was solemnly, but rapidly, added to, watched, and tasted until it was rendered into a finished product, which Montresor’s judgment pronounced worthy of all that had been said of it. Perhaps he was aided by a glass or two of Madeira which he “thought it wise to take”—having already shown he could abstain. Then came various sweets with fanciful names such as “Angels’ Food,” “Floating Island,” and “Good Friday.”

Everything, as Ridgeway boasted, had been grown on the place, gathered, caught, or shot by his own people, just as when his family first settled in the country two hundred years before.

They remained at the table while coffee was served from an immense silver pot, after which the ladies trooped off in the good, old English style.

Conversation was resumed with praise of the feast; and the host, after gratified deprecation of it, effected a diversion at the first opportunity by saying:

“I am sorry to tell you, Mr. Montresor, that ——

(the Member of Congress from Mississippi) could not come, as he promised; but our friend Robinson here will, I hope, keep you on your mettle, as I expect to send you two out together to the south, and the others to the north. Ronderson, I will pair you and Thompson off, and can lend you both guns, as I hear you haven't brought your own."

"Ridgeway, if you don't mind, I'll wait until I've gotten the Extradition Treaty through and settled up my private affairs before I go on any such dangerous expedition. Donnelly told me, Thompson, that while you were out in that mining town you were the only man in the place who had never killed anything, either man or beast. The first thing you would do would be to blow my head off."

As Thompson had no intention of shooting, that couple was abandoned; but the Senator's remark caused the conversation to recur to the frequency of accidents in the field. Nearly every one, including Robinson, had some instance to give, and Ridgeway showed a broad-brimmed hat with several shot-holes in it, which had come from the accidental discharge of an "empty" gun in the hands of one of the most experienced and careful men he knew. Whereupon the Senator remarked there had been more accidents since the introduction of breech-loaders, as men were in the habit—or *thought* they were—of unloading when they stopped shooting, and every one knew how dangerous an "unloaded" gun was. Then they fell to discussing guns, and Robinson mentioned that he had a hammerless one, just made for him by Purdy, and had never before shot with one of the kind, whereupon he was accused of preparing an excuse for bad shooting.



Ridgeway, who was an inveterate whist-player, thought they would have time for just one rubber before joining the ladies; and, cutting the cards, Montresor found Robinson and himself partners against Ridgeway and the German. The last-named was a great gambler, and insisted upon side-bets; so, as they commenced to play the rubber, Montresor and Robinson saw it might stand them quite a sum. Their last hands, while fair, were difficult; but, by brilliant play, especially on Robinson's part, they won, and Montresor could not help abating in reserve toward his partner when the latter gave him all the credit.

When they joined the ladies, Montresor noticed that Mrs. Morton was seated upon a sofa with Miss Preston, while the others, quite apart, were gathered around the fireplace in such a manner as to offer little encouragement to any one seeking to join them. He knew that this aloofness was not directed against Mrs. Morton, and he warmly approved of her for sharing the exclusion of the young Virginian. Nor did it occur to him that the older woman, having divined the partiality of the men for their little hostess, thought it good policy to pair with her. Whether this was the motive or not, it answered well, for not only Montresor, but also the Senator and the German, made straight for the couple, leaving the trio, which had immediately become most expansive, to be entertained by the other men.

When the hour for retiring came, they all went into the hall, where, each person having taken one of the brightly polished brass candlesticks, ranged upon a table, and lighted the candles, they trooped up the handsome staircase, with its slender spiral

balusters. The ladies led the way, and made a pretty picture, as, with one hand catching their skirts, they held high in the other the lights, which shone lustrously upon their faces and necks. At each dark passageway leading from the gallery stood servants bearing lighted candles to show the way, their black faces and garments aiding the oak wainscoting of the hall, somber with age, to throw into striking contrast the brilliant complexions and bright dresses of the women, who followed in the train of Beatrix. The latter paused before leaving the gallery and, this time making a curtsey outright, kissed her hand with decorous gayety to her uncle, who, the last to ascend, stood beside the carved newel post at the foot of the stairs.

"I'd give a fortune, Ridgeway," exclaimed the Senator, "to have been standing where you were, or anywhere in the line of fire."

"Oh," laughed the other, "Trixie is too good a shot to have missed the one she intended—or thought she intended. But what would Mrs. Ronderson say to such a speech?"

"It was, no doubt," returned Ronderson, "a premonition of this which made her too sick to come."

This statement, with its pretended ignorance of female motives, the Senator could afford to make, as the frank attachment between his wife and himself was well known. He had not been the only man wishing himself in the line of fire; but when Miss Thompson, thinking the action pretty, threw a kiss to her father—although from her position she enfiladed the whole ascending file of men—no perceptible havoc seemed to have been wrought.

The lighted candles, the sweet country girl, the

Chippendale furniture and figured paper of his room, with its testered and curtained bedstead secreted in an alcove, reminded Montresor pleasantly of restful nooks in his own country. So when, strengthened by Alpine experiences, he had clambered into the high bed, he soon forgot all his troubles and perplexities in dreamless and unruffled sleep.

Miss Preston presided at breakfast the next morning, dispensing coffee with generous judgment. Mrs. Morton put in a tardy appearance, but the other women asked to have that meal sent to their rooms. Even the Senator's hearty appetite staggered along hesitatingly, and then succumbed utterly, before the substantial array of bacon and eggs, fish, steaks, chops, sausages, cold ham, quail, big and little hominy, cornbread, hot rolls, and griddle cakes with syrup, pressed upon them with anxious solicitude by Ridgeway and his fair aide.

The Senator decided overnight that he would try shooting, "to see if he had forgotten," and Thompson said he would go and watch them. Just before starting, Ridgeway, after consultation with his men, determined to reverse the direction of the parties, and sent Montresor and Robinson to the south, instead of the north, as had been previously arranged.

There had been a sharp, white frost in the night, which still gleamed almost like snow upon the surface of the fields, as at nine o'clock they drove off to cover. The air had, as if by magic, lost the damp, penetrating quality of the preceding day, and was now dry and exhilarating; so these two men, although enemies at heart, were able, from sheer force of out-of-door animal enjoyment and their keen in-

terest in the prospective sport, to talk easily and amicably about the topic of the hour.

After a drive of about twenty minutes they left the light wagon, which was to pick them up later at a designated point, and were soon at work in an adjacent field, where they almost immediately found a bevy of quail. Although a fair shot, Montresor, being unaccustomed to the flight of this particular bird, did not, at first, do nearly so well as Robinson. When they had finished this field, they took a wood-path across to another, where Mercury, who was their guide, assured them they would find the best shooting in all that country.

Over into this Montresor climbed the high-railed, zig-zag, "snake" fence; but Robinson, before following him, discovered the loss of his silver brandy flask.

"I took a drink," said he, "just as we started on this path, and it must have slipped to the ground when I thought I was putting it into my hip-pocket. Mercury, run back and get it for me, and meet us at the other end of the field. I can work the dogs, and I'll give you a dollar if you find it."

The darky hesitated, and said:

"I dunno 'bout dat, Missah Robinson. It's mighty bad luck ebber to turn back, and Massa George tole me he counted on me for to gib you gemmen good spote."

"That's all right," returned Robinson, with some impatience. "I'll give you another dollar to keep the luck."

"Well, sah," Mercury acquiesced, "'long as you takes de 'sponsibility dat way, I s'pose I mus' go."

Whereupon he started off with an alacrity which

might be accounted for either by confidence in the talismanic effects of the extra dollar, or else an expectation that he would find in the flask inherent consolation for any ill luck that could come.

The dogs had scrambled over the fence and were nosing about quietly near at hand; but Robinson delayed, first to tie the laces of his boots, then to adjust the buckles of his leather leggings, and finally to light another cigarette. Meantime, Mercury, who had started off singing "Oh, dem golden slippers," could no longer be heard, his voice having gradually died away in the distance. Then Robinson prepared, methodically, to mount. With his left hand he grasped the top rail, at the same time balancing upon it, muzzle foremost, the gun, which he held with his right, thus bringing the weapon on a level, and in line with his right eye. While, apparently, his attitude was simply that of a man making ready to climb, the effect was that the gun, its stock held firmly against his shoulder, was pointed directly at Montresor, who, with his back turned, stood not more than ten paces distant.

The latter, following Robinson's example, had started to light a cigarette, and, at the moment the gun was pointed toward him, he turned sidewise to avoid the wind. In his left hand, which he used to shelter the flame of the match, he held a silver match-box, given him by Mrs. Rae as a cotillon favor the last time they had danced together. Its surface was so highly polished that objects could be seen as in a mirror, and it happened to be at such an angle that, as he reached his head forward in the act of lighting he saw reflected in it the image of

Robinson aiming his gun. Turning his head, he looked straight into the eyes of an enemy, full of malignant, deadly hatred.

Why did Robinson delay the shot? Was it because he had no real intention of shooting, or was it the tigerish instinct to play with a victim and enjoy the sight of his terror at the doom before him? If the last were his wish, it met with grievous disappointment.

In affairs of action Montresor was courageous, resourceful, and of quick decision. He had only a few seconds, but in that time his plan of defense came to him like a flash of inspiration, and was carried out. He knew that if he made any movement to aim his own gun, Robinson could blow his brains out; for, as he looked, he could see right down the barrels. His only chance was to disturb the aim of the assassin.

As they had reached the field, Mercury had indicated, about a hundred yards lower down, another path leading through the woods straight to Sudley, only a half-mile distant. Pointing in this direction with his left hand, but keeping his eye upon Robinson, Montresor said, nonchalantly:

"Do you know who that is coming over there?"

Robinson gave a startled turn, and at the same instant there was an explosion, while Montresor felt upon his cheek a rush of air that was like a slap. Without waiting to see what was the new state of affairs, Montresor threw his gun into a position of "ready."

"My God!" exclaimed Robinson, from out of the smoke which enveloped him. "Are you hurt?"

"No," replied Montresor, in a voice which he had

hard work to control. "You may have better luck next time."

"Mr. Montresor," returned Robinson, in a surprised voice, "as I know you are not easily rattled, you must be crazy. Do you suppose that was intentional? It's the first time I've shot a hammerless gun, and I didn't know the d——d thing was cocked. Besides, what possible motive could I have? Our relations are not intimate, but have not been unfriendly. You are an Englishman; I am an American——"

"An *Irish-American*, a purist might say," interjected Montresor.

"Well," retorted Robinson, "supposing that were true, which it is not, and I a political agitator, it would not explain. The son of Lord Broadlands is surely not a Scotland Yard detective—and the most imaginative person could not find the proverbial *woman* in the case."

Montresor had retained his presence of mind and quickness of decision in the face of a problem of physical peril; but the moment a moral or ethical dilemma was pointed at him he was conscious of weak indecision. He reflected that he had no definite proof of Robinson's connection with the Black claim, nor with the Irish movement; and as for there being any woman concerned in it, and that woman Katherine—he would rather be shot to pieces than have her name breathed in such a connection.

Robinson, however, continued:

"But, aside from motive, do you think, if I wanted to kill you, I would do it when there were a couple of women in full view?"

He pointed toward the same path Montresor had

indicated, and the latter was astonished to see coming toward them Miss Preston, accompanied by her negro maid, a woman about forty years old—in fact, she had first been her nurse. They were advancing cautiously, so as not to interfere with the shooting, and were not yet within speaking distance.

"It's Miss Preston!" said Montresor, in a disconcerted tone.

"Yes," responded the other; "and we must decide before she gets here whether I shot at you or at quail."

"Quail," Montresor said, shortly, turning his back upon Robinson and waving his hat to Miss Preston.

"Why, Mr. Montresor," exclaimed that young lady, when she was near enough, "where is my Uncle George? Was not he to shoot to the south and you to the north? I have brought a letter to him, which came by the mail and was marked important, so I thought he ought to have it at once."

"Your uncle changed the plan just as we were starting," was the response.

"How provoking!" said Miss Preston, in rather a resigned tone. "And did you get anything just now?"

"No," said Montresor. "Mr. Robinson had rather a difficult shot, and failed to get a quail."

"What a nice way to say it! Isn't it, Mr. Robinson?" said Miss Preston. "Did the dogs find it, and which way did it rise?"

"Yes, and it was over that way," replied Robinson, pointing at random.

Then she called the dogs, which were not in sight, and they rose, in a totally different place from that which Robinson had indicated, from some broom-



grass where they had "dropped to shot," patiently waiting for orders.

Miss Preston looking askance at this, Robinson stammered, rather awkwardly:

"I thought the dogs got it up, but must have been mistaken."

Miss Preston took the dogs and put them at the place whence the quail was supposed to have risen, but they could find no trace of scent.

"May I request you, Mr. Robinson," said the capable young woman, "to stand where you were when you shot? Then, I warrant you, we'll find where Mr. Bird was."

Robinson did as he was bidden in rather a helpless sort of way for one usually so self-confident.

That part of the field was not more than fifty yards wide, and Miss Preston, taking the dogs, went to the fence opposite that by which Robinson stood, and, going along carefully, soon found some fresh marks of shot. This indicated the line of Robinson's fire, and, therefore, the quail probably rose somewhere near it. Then advancing straight toward Robinson, the dogs ranging on each side, when she came within twenty yards of him without finding any trace, her expression changed from one of reproachful surprise to pretty, yet indignant, disapproval. She stopped short and exclaimed:

"Why, Mr. Robinson! You certainly must allow me to say that you were shockingly careless. Mr. Montresor was standing by that dead tree, and your shot must have passed within a foot of his head!"

"Where two extremes do meet," quoted Montresor, anxious to laugh the matter off. "Really, Miss Preston, you give me the uncomfortable feel-

ing of being doubled up like a contortionist, or a man who has been put in a sack."

The young lady would not be thus diverted, but said, severely:

"I assure you my Uncle George and my brother both say that a man who becomes excited when shooting ought not to go out with others."

Whether he did not wish to be thought an excitable shot, or that he saw it would irritate Montresor to be made the hero of an incident, or because he thought Miss Preston had her suspicions, Robinson promptly said:

"To tell the truth, Miss Preston, my gun went off accidentally as I was getting over the fence. You see, I am not used to a hammerless gun, and didn't know it was cocked. Mr. Montresor wished to spare my feelings by not mentioning it; but you set about tearing our theoretical quail to pieces, so we might as well confess. You'd make a great detective—Monsieur Lecocq wouldn't be in it with you!"

Dr. Watson had not then taken to writing, or Robinson would have said Sherlock Holmes; but even Lecocq was not known to Miss Preston, whose only reading of detective stories had been those of Poe and, perhaps, "No Name," by that "new writer," Wilkie Collins. Still, she understood the implication of shrewdness, and answered:

"Oh, I only did as I've seen my brother George do when some one had shot and did not notice where the bird rose exactly—or the direction. You see, I often go out with my brother, and sometimes he lets me shoot. Perhaps you would let me try your gun a few shots?"

"Oh, I see," said Robinson, with a laugh a trifle

forced; "I'm a naughty, awkward boy, and am to have my new toy taken away from me. But I'll show you how well I can take my punishment."

There was a tone of intimacy in this, which Miss Preston set right with that indescribably placid, impersonal manner:

"Oh, no, sir; I have no right to punish. It is a case of 'miss and out'—that is all."

"But it isn't fair to call it a miss," pleaded Robinson, less intimately, "for I did not aim at Mr. Montresor. If I had, I should not have missed."

"You see," explained Montresor, "Englishmen are not in season this month in Virginia. Now, in Ireland they are always in season, and quite a lot of them are bagged every year. They are such stupid birds, they never seek cover."

"Mr. Montresor," said Miss Preston, earnestly, "you should not make game of your own countrymen—even in jest." The speaker seemed utterly unconscious of a pun.

"Perhaps," said Robinson, "the reason Ireland has no close season for Englishmen is that they are considered too plentiful, and a little thinning out will improve the breed, according to the sporting maxim. But that cannot apply in Virginia—assuredly not at Sudley." His tone was one of good-natured raillery; yet Miss Preston looked sharply from one man to the other, and then called out:

"Hie on, Shot! Hie on, Cedric! Hie on, Fan!"

Robinson handed her his gun, which she examined critically; and, trying it up against her shoulder, said:

"It fits me very well, considering it was made for

you. When did Purdy make it for you, Mr. Robinson?"

"Last summer," was the reply.

Montresor thought he detected a glance of intelligence toward himself from Miss Preston.

Not long afterward, having found a bevy of quail, they got to work, and Miss Preston acquitted herself very well for a woman. Montresor continued to shoot rather below his usual form, and upon one occasion his weaker partner "wiped his eye," as she expressed it—that is, shot a bird after he had missed with both barrels. When she had killed four or five, she handed the gun to Robinson, saying:

"Now, I will trespass on your kindness no longer. But I hope you gentlemen will allow us to follow you until we meet Mercury, who can tell us where the wagon is, and we can ride home."

Both men said they would be delighted, but Montresor added it must be poor fun for her to watch his own bad shooting.

"Mr. Montresor," said she, solemnly, "I wish you would try shootin' without that hat Uncle George loaned you. Mercury says it always brings bad luck. But perhaps you don't believe in luck?"

"I may not believe in luck, but I do in bad luck," replied Montresor, somewhat gloomily.

"How ungrateful you are!" was the serious response, "when your life has just been spared so mercifully. Let me carry it for you."

"Now I believe in luck," said Montresor, gallantly.

Whether being rid of the hat improved matters, or Robinson's being at his side stimulated the killing instinct, it is certain that Montresor shot better than he had ever done before, and wiped Robinson's eye

so often that the latter might have been Argus troubled with granulation of the lids. This had a wonderful effect in improving the temper of one and depressing that of the other; indeed, so exasperated did the latter become, that he began to disregard all the courtesy of the field and shoot at birds on Montresor's side, without giving him a chance to fire. At length, in his anxiety to get a rapidly swinging quail, he shot right across Montresor, and within a yard of him.

Beatrix sprang forward, exclaiming:

"Zounds, man! Then, recovering herself: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Robinson; but, really, that was Mr. Montresor's bird. Besides, it was very dangerous. You should reflect that, by your forgetfulness, Mr. Montresor has already come within an inch of losing his life."

"You said before it was a foot," retorted Robinson, again with an intimate tone.

Serene and crisp, but courteously, Miss Preston replied:

"But I find that an inch is nearer the truth. If you will have the goodness to look at this hat, you will see a shot-hole through the brim here within an inch of where the head was. This is not one of the old shot-holes; it is perfectly fresh, as you may see. Besides, the old ones were in the crown."

Robinson seemed genuinely affected by this discovery, either because he had come so near to taking human life, or because with a little more luck he would have quieted a troublesome man. But Montresor, wishing to avoid any coupling of his name with Robinson's in any incident whatever, said, quite emphatically:

"Miss Preston, it would be a great favor to me if Mr. Robinson and yourself would agree to drop this trifling incident. I wasn't hurt a bit, and we might just as well discuss the fences where I didn't fall, or the orange peel I didn't slip on, as this. Perhaps you would also tell your maid not to say anything?"

"Oh, Minerva and I have been brought up on such secrets. Why, I even have a friend who would never tell me the name of a gentleman who shot at another *on purpose* while they were out shootin'."

"*He* must have been very hard-hearted," said Montresor, quizzingly.

"It was not a *he*," responded Miss Preston. "But afterward the brother of the man who did the shoot-in' told me about it, because I had heard of it as an *accident*; and he thought that sounded so inexperienced."

The conversation seemed to be, quite unconsciously to Miss Preston, straying into a suggestive phase, but was restored by Robinson saying:

"Of course, I am quite ready to say nothing about my own carelessness—or forgetfulness, as Miss Preston so kindly put it.

When they reached the end of the field, Mercury was there, accompanied by a strong odor of brandy. He was very loquacious; but, as they just then struck a large bevy, he addressed Miss Preston, to whom he seemed to be making an abject explanation.

Abandoning her intention of seeking the wagon, she continued to follow the guns.

"Lord-a-massy, chile!" exclaimed Minerva, as they forced their way through a mass of brambles;

"you suttently does love to see de gemmen shoot bu'ds mo' d'n I does."

Montresor, also, could not help wondering at her unflinching pertinacity; especially when, as she daintily lifted her skirt in stepping over a log, he saw she wore very thin shoes, and also perceived a spot of blood upon one of the white stockings which encased her neatly formed calves.

As they were driving home to a late luncheon, Miss Preston said:

"That is a delightfully balanced gun of yours, Mr. Robinson. Was it all made especially for you, or only the stock?"

"The whole gun," answered Robinson, rather proudly; "mostly from my own directions."

Montresor did not at the time divine any significance in this question; but late that afternoon, as he and Miss Preston were having a chat in the drawing-room, in discussing the merits of Purdy's guns, which her brother thought the best in the world, she said:

"But he has an exceedingly capricious way of numbering them; for, do you know, my brother got one from him two years ago, and yet it is a later number than Mr. Robinson's, which was made only last summer."

She was so innocent and casual in saying this, no one could have guessed whether or not she drew the conclusion that Robinson had been lying—and lying for a purpose. So much was this the case that even Montresor did not at first think of its significance, but rather felt some unmanly indignation that Beatrix's brother should spend four or five hundred dollars for a new gun and his sister have to appear in

the same poplin she had worn the first day. Possibly he would not have noticed this last fact but for the significant glances and not very perfectly subdued comments of the other women.

The commiseration he felt, however, seemed wasted upon the young woman herself, who preserved a jaunty obliviousness which made an additional aggravation for her critics. Not that they were unusually bad-natured, but it seemed stupid that a girl should be so hopelessly wrong and not know it.



## CHAPTER XVI

### PRINCIPALLY ABOUT BEATRIX PRESTON

BEATRIX had shown herself as old-fashioned in other matters as in dress. For, although in the long winter evenings, or the long summer afternoons of an isolated country neighborhood, she had, with a naturally avid mind, read everything in her father's fairly large library, yet there were no books in it that were up to date. It had been impressed upon her by her grandmother that "Sir Charles Grandison," "Thaddeus of Warsaw," or "Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life" were not exactly modern books; but that "Rob Roy," "David Copperfield," or "The New-comers" could be, as Miss Thompson expressed it, "back numbers," had not seemed a possibility. Yet Di Vernon, Aunt Betsy Trotwood and Colonel Newcome were to all the younger women, except Beatrix, mere names with which they had, from allusions in current literature, vague associations of characteristics, but without any vital identity. The Boston girl thought that the Virginia girl meant Mr. Weller when she alluded to Uncle Toby's being subjected to the wiles of a widow, and Corporal Trim was as much a stranger to one as Private Mulvaney was to the other.

"I suppose, Miss Marblehead," Beatrix had remarked, "you will never agree with us Virginians

that Poe had greater genius than any other poet of America, for you will be claiming that honor for Longfellow."

"Not I," responded the other in shocked tones, "for neither of them can be mentioned in the same breath as Walt Whitman."

"Why, I never even heard of him," was the frank avowal from Beatrix.

"How very much mortified he would be if he knew that!" Miss Marblehead rejoined with icy sarcasm.

"Oh, I am sure he would not," came in tones of tranquil deprecation, "for I very much doubt if he has ever heard of *me*."

The Senator had chuckled with delight, and delivered a most amusing monologue upon Scott, Bulwer, Dickens, Thackeray, Poe, etc., which Beatrix had enjoyed with childish pleasure. He wound up by saying:

"If you haven't time to read these authors, then you ought to get up classes to give you a smattering of them—just as you do in Architecture and Buddhism, otherwise you will not really appreciate half the allusions of even the self-sufficient, cock-sure literature of our own time. When some writer speaks of Colonel Newcome's 'Adsum', you have a dumb notion that it was on his deathbed and that it means 'Present', but no more idea of the character it stood for than I have of Buddha—thank heaven! And you don't know the difference between Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Briggs, or Tristram Shandy and Charles O'Malley——"

"I don't agree with you, Senator, about Dickens," said Mrs. Thompson. "He is so vulgar. The people we know don't read his books."

"Perhaps not," retorted the other, "but we *know* the people *in* his books. Jefferson Brick we meet every day in Washington, and I'll bet if Mr. Montresor had come over in the steerage, like Martin Chuzzlewit, there are still some people 'we know' who would be shocked at knowing him. Don't squirm, Montresor! Mrs. Thompson herself crossed in the same steamer with you, and knows you traveled first-class."

This chance allusion to the voyage had comic aptness, Montresor thought; but the Thompsons seemed entirely indifferent to it. Still, he deemed that the subject of literature had been sufficiently discussed, and proposed that, as the threatening rain had actually commenced, they should have some music.

Miss Marblehead (who, being "new" in Boston, was flagrantly cultured) was first asked to favor them, but resisted with conventional diffidence and preliminary reluctance, finally making a rush for the piano just as efforts to persuade her were being abandoned.

She played with brilliant precision; and from "adagio" to "prestissimo" the movements went with metronomic exactitude; but her lack of touch paralyzed all feeling. Grieg, the musical idol at the time, lost all poetry and became merely a lugubrious proser; while one of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies had the rattle-bang speed of an automobile, and just as little human passion. As an artistic contrast she then gave Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, rendered with such punctual method that Montresor whispered to Mrs. Morton it ought to be called the "Lime-light Sonata." Still, Beethoven is Beethoven, and when it was finished ~~Beatrix's~~ eyes had a humid

softness as she expressed her pleasure to Miss Marblehead.

Then Montresor, who had heard Beatrix say how fond she was of music, asked her to sing and play something, in which request he was warmly seconded by the Senator and Ridgeway. She consented, with sweet self-effacement in her desire to please her guests, toward whom she felt delinquent for having abandoned her place in the house that morning. It was no quittance, in her mind, that the other ladies had sent her a message saying they would be down for luncheon, and one inviting Mrs. Morton to a game of cards.

She first sang a song of Byron's, set to music by Balfe:

"There be none of Beauty's daughters  
With a magic like thee;  
And like soft music o'er the waters  
Is thy sweet voice to me."

Although her voice was pure and sweet, there was an evident lack of training; still, it was human, and if she did not catch her breath in the right place the Senator and Montresor caught theirs at certain strains of earnest feeling. The former's emotion became frankly apparent when she followed this with "Annie Laurie"; but Miss Thompson, in a giggling whisper, quoted a senseless college gag,

"And the band played 'Annie Laurie',"

to Miss Marblehead, whose suppressed convulsions of laughter seemed as artificial as her music.

Then Beatrix gave "The Maiden's Prayer" with a pretty childish air of sentiment, especially as, in the exigencies of playing, her left hand made graceful curves over the right one into the treble. It was not great music, but it made a sweet and lovable picture. A piece by Gottschalk, with variations—too many, Miss Marblehead evidently thought—was followed by one to which no title was given, as Beatrix's fingers strayed into it while talking, and it was very short.

"Oh, why do you stop so soon?" Miss Marblehead asked. Then, with a wink at Miss Thompson, "Has this piece no variations?"

"Not that I know of, I assure you, Miss Marblehead," was the response of sweet, anxious courtesy, "but it is so simple that you might improvise some. It is Moore's song, 'Come, rest on this bosom'."

This was greeted, according to temperament, with guffaws and smiles, to the evident embarrassment of the Boston girl, as, although undeniably handsome, she had passed well into the thirties in maidenly independence without any interference on the part of the "Somerset set of men."

Beatrix looked around in wondering surprise, so guilelessly that every one, except her uncle, had a doubt of its being anything but a chance shot. Mr. Ridgeway, quite unconscious of the disdain with which his niece had been treated, and, equally, of the satire in Miss Marblehead's question, was pained that anything should cause discomfiture to a guest. Indeed, it is questionable if it would have made any difference had he known the slighting manners of the others; for, so rigid is the cult of hospitality in the South, that no amount of bad behavior in a guest

can justify a retaliation in kind on the part of a host or any member of his household.

Nor can it be said with certainty that Miss Preston was guilty of an infraction of this code, since it must be observed that any recorded speech of hers, which may have the appearance of resentful retort, is quite explicable as being accidentally so, and in reality only a natural and harmless remark. It is true that, in her own family, which thought her rather quick-witted, these coincidences were considered marvelously frequent; but they also knew that there was not in her nature a trace of anything malevolent or acrid; and, as I have the same knowledge, while I may, like her uncle, indicate a public and hypothetical disapproval, I shall, like him, as soon as we are alone together, call her a "little rascal" and give her a hearty kiss.

From the piano the Senator bore her off for a *tête-à-tête*, where, as he afterward confessed to Montresor, before he knew it he found himself gossiping about Washington people "like an old woman—or an old clubman."

"She didn't seem to realize that her chance remarks were making me volunteer information, any more than I did, until it was too late," said he; "and all the time she had a smiling, amiable manner, as if my prattle was passing in at one ear and out at the other; but I don't think quite all of it *did*."

In the inevitable grouping and falling apart of a long afternoon Montresor found himself alone with Beatrix, and she made her comment upon Purdy's erratic numbering of his guns. When he had recovered from his internal indignation at Beatrix's not having a "Purdy" gun, he drew the inference

that, in all probability, Robinson had lied about the time he had been in possession of his gun, so as to prepare in advance an excuse for an accident he had deliberately determined should happen. He tried to find out if this shrewd child had any suspicions; but in this he was entirely unsuccessful, for she was as elusive as a bird. Like a bird she would flit away the moment he was in reach, not as if avoiding anything, but because the mood took her; and after another laborious approach, there was a bright little chirp, a quick flip of the wings, and she was on a branch, a little too high, nor could he make out whether her twitter was silly laughter, or sage advice to get up early if he wished to catch ever so helpless a worm of the field.

But in one thing he found her very serious. It was when she begged him not to wear that unlucky hat of her uncle's. He taxed her with superstition, and she gravely admitted that she had some, such as passing under a ladder and breaking a looking-glass.

"As to that," said Montresor, "of course there is danger in passing under a ladder, for the workmen above may let something fall on you; and a man who is careless enough to break a looking-glass is careless enough to crack his own skull."

"So the wise Mr. Montresor agrees with poor little me," she retorted; "only, what he calls caution in himself he calls superstition in me!"

"No," said Montresor, "only, if anything happens I call it a coincidence."

"Does that make the killing any different?" she asked seriously, and then continued, "But have you not one superstition yourself, Mr. Montresor?"

"Well—yes!" he admitted; "I have been so much with sailors that I do have an uncomfortable feeling about starting on Friday; but you Americans ought not to have it, because you know Columbus set sail and also discovered America on a Friday."

"Yes," returned she, earnestly, "but he died poor and neglected and the land he discovered was named after another man. If he had not started on a Friday he would have eaten his egg in comfort instead of using it to instruct others."

Notwithstanding this defense of superstition, Montresor, more from a teasing spirit than anything else, persisted in withholding his promise not to wear the unlucky hat, and Beatrix, apparently, gave up the attempt.

Presently the conversation turned upon Mercury and the affair of the brandy flask, of which she said:

"You certainly must believe, Mr. Montresor, that I was mortified to death when I discovered he had been drinking Mr. Robinson's brandy. But he was so funny in denying it that I almost laughed in his face. 'I 'clare to goodness! Miss Trixie, and hope I may die in my tracks, if ebber I touch a drop of dat brandy ceppen to smell. You see, it was jess dis way: Mas' Robinson, he shoo me off so quick I didn't get no 'scription of his flask ceppen dat it were silber, an' had some mighty good brandy in it. So, when I come across dat one, I jess say to myself *unless* it's got good brandy in it, it ain't Massa Robinson's; so I jess po'd some out on my pocket-hankercher an' smelt it—an' den I knowed whar it belonged. An' dat's de 'ones' trufe, Miss Trixie.' Then, when a single quail got up, he thought it was



a pair, and said: 'It's de fust time I ebber seed birds a-matin' in February.' I told him he had seen double, and scolded him roundly."

Montresor laughed, and asked if he had confessed.

"Not point-blank," she replied; "but he said: 'It's de smellin' affected my head, too; you bettah believe me, Miss Trixie, dat's de stronges' liquor you ebber did tas'—smell, I mean.' Then he turned the conversation by asking how you had gotten on with that 'onlucky hat'; and I became convinced, although he would not admit it, that he had experimented during Uncle George's absence by letting persons wear it for whom he had no great regard—like Little Peter."

Montresor made a mental note of this fact, and determined he would not wear it himself any more; but Beatrix rattled on:

"I scolded him right well, and told him I had a great mind to tell Uncle George; and that had much effect in sober—I mean in abating the effect of the smell he had of Mr. Robinson's brandy." Her eyes had a dancing, mischievous light, but her face wore its imperturbably innocent look.

Montresor wished that Mercury had been more severely punished, but contented himself with asking why he had done such a thing.

"I really think, Mr. Montresor," said she, "we may call it scientific curiosity—or spirit of investigation. You see, Mercury is an unbeliever, or, as he expressed it, 'don't believe in nothin', t'ank de Lord,' and he was just trying the experiment to see if anything would happen; he didn't think there would, but if it did, it had better happen to some 'wuthless nigger' like Little Peter."

"But how is it," asked Montresor, "that the valet of a devout Catholic happens to be an atheist?"

Miss Preston's face took on a solemn severity as she replied:

"That I can explain to your satisfaction, I am sure. It seems my uncle has a friend, a Professor Donelly, who is an atheist—how he can have such a friend I cannot imagine—and this gentleman comes here frequently on visits; and he is very good at sports, telling what the weather is going to be, finding his way in the woods, giving medicine—oh, almost everything, and pretends to be as easy and kind to everybody as if he were a Christian. So Mercury got to worship the very ground he trod on, and would drink in every word he said when he was talking to the white people, trying to prove that the world wasn't made in six days, that the sun didn't stand still for Joshua, and such stuff. Still, from what I hear, even that would not have corrupted him, if it hadn't happened that one day, while at church, his Sunday coat, with a rabbit's foot in the pocket, was stolen, and that was too much for him. So he went to Uncle George and said: 'I hopes you'll 'scuse me, Mars George, but if religion can't keep my coat from bein' stole on Sunday, *at church*, an' WITH A RABBIT FOOT IN IT, it's too onreliable for me to project with any mo', an' I ain't goin' to b'leve dis wurd was made in six days or any odder days.' "

She was so perfectly serious as she recounted this that Montresor restrained his laughter at Mercury's absurd reasoning, and asked her:

"How did your uncle like his backsliding? Didn't he try to show him what an ass he was?"

"Oh, Mr. Montresor, my Uncle George would

rather die than try to influence a servant about religion. And I think it's rather severe to call poor Mercury an ass, because almost any one, except the very good or the *very intelligent*, is apt, when he gets into trouble, to feel resentful about it. You know, the heathens beat their gods when anything goes wrong; and we often feel that way ourselves, I am sure. Don't you think so, Mr. Montresor?"

Had this girl read Montresor's heart, and was she giving him a half-mocking, half-serious lecture? He could not tell; there was about her a simple inscrutability which baffled many. Perhaps it was the high arch of her penciled eyebrows which gave her that pretty air of inquiry and made him think she was searching more deeply than was really the case. She seemed to him the embodiment of his own psychological condition at that time, for he could not determine whether it was something enduring and purposeful, or a fluttering, casual existence, such as the ancients pictured in the butterfly. He strove to give the latter tone to his reply as he said:

"If I acknowledge that I behave in the same way as Mercury, I shall have to, in ordinary consistency, call myself an ass; and I don't like to do that, even to agree with your adroit implication of the fact."

"Oh, Mr. Montresor, how can you say so!" came in sweet, limpid, courteous protest, leaving him, however, with the feeling that, after all, he *was* an ass.

"I shall," said he, "change the subject violently by reminding you of your promise to show me the secret passage."

This was one of the interesting sights of the place, and consisted of a concealed door in the dining-room and a subterranean passage leading to the stable—a

contrivance for escape from a beleaguered house quite common in the Southern colonies. She at once gaily acceded to his request, saying, in a girlish spirit of frolic:

"I'll tell you what we will do, Mr. Montresor; we'll play that you are a Britisher—which you are, and I an American patriot—which I am, and that you are trying to capture me——"

"Which I am," interjected Montresor.

"——with a horde of other men——"

"*All* the men you know, of course," again interrupted Montresor.

"——and these men are posted all around the house——"

"Four of them in the drawing-room" was equally disregarded by the dramatist, who continued:

"I shall be seated at the table in the dining-room when you burst in—gently—and I shall try to escape——"

"'Gently,' also, I beseech you," pleaded Montresor.

"I must confess, sir," was the bland reply, "that Americans are not very good at running away from the British—they have had so little practice, you see."

"If you, Miss Preston, will only follow the traditions of your race, it will completely justify our international history."

Thus bantering each other, they had risen and moved toward the drawing-room door, at which point Beatrix, having demanded a moment's start, was bowed out by Montresor with the stately courtesy of one who has just given the enemy's ambassador his passports.

Some of the guests had gone to their rooms, and the remaining ones had gathered around a lamp to examine an autograph letter of George Washington which Ridgeway was showing them, giving, apparently, no attention to the movements outside of their circle.

After a little delay, covered with the time-honored expedient of setting his watch by the drawing-room clock, Montresor went out into the hall and walked leisurely along until, according to stage directions, he "burst gently" into the dining-room.

There he beheld Beatrix seated at the opposite side of the table, with knife and fork in hand, enjoying a Barmecidean feast by the light of a single candle. She wore her three-cornered riding-hat, and the Corinthian pilasters and graceful curved festoons of the white Colonial mantelpiece behind her made a frame which well suggested that this was some pretty boy-officer of the Revolution—a dandy withal, as attested by his lace jabot in studied Steinkirk disarray. All this he saw at a glance; for, at the instant the door was opened, Beatrix sprang up, clapped an extinguisher upon the candle, upset a high-backed Flemish chair, to provide an obstacle, and, as Montresor made a dash around the table, he could dimly perceive the object of his pursuit swing open one of the pilasters. He stumbled upon the chair, but, recovering himself partially, attempted to lay a decorous hand upon Beatrix. She, however, gave him a vigorous shove, which did credit to the masculine character she had assumed, and sufficed, under the difficult circumstances, to send him sprawling upon all fours. By the time he was upon his

feet again he heard the secret door click and found himself alone.

He fumbled for his match-box, meaning to relight the candle and try to discover the means of opening the pilaster—he knew the spring was in the capital—when he heard a step in the hall; and, upon looking toward the partially open door, was able to distinguish, by the dim light drifting from the feeble hall lamp, that it was Miss Thompson. He moved toward her; but, before he could speak, she gave an affected little scream, and said:

“How you frightened me, Mr. Montresor! I suppose, like myself, you came to get a glass of water?”

“Oh, no,” said he; “I thought I had my match-box with me in here after luncheon. Ah, here it is, just where I thought, on the mantelpiece.”

As he had only put it there a second or two before, this was not surprising.

“I wonder, Mr. Montresor,” said Miss Thompson, in a teasing voice, “that you can tear yourself away from Miss Preston for such a trifle as a match-box. But I suppose you had to allow her time to change her dress—if she does change it. *Plus ça change plus c’est la même chose.*”

“That is fortunate,” said Montresor; “for any change in Miss Preston would be the loss of some charm.”

“Oh, my,” laughed Miss Thompson; “haven’t you got it bad—and so sudden! I suppose you think I was very nasty in my criticism; but you must confess that dressing is not her strong point.”

“I think it is,” he maintained, stoutly; “but her beauty and cleverness are still stronger ones.”

While this conversation proceeded he had tried to

relight the candle; but Beatrix had jammed the wick down so hard that before he could do so the match went out.

"Well, you *certainly* are in love, Mr. Montresor," said Miss Thompson, mimicking Beatrix. "What will the fair lady of Lafayette Square say when she hears of such devotion?"

This daring speech struck Montresor with conflicting emotions. The natural and obvious one was resentment at the freedom taken; but quite as decided, although unacknowledged, was a thrill of enjoyment at the mere implication that what he did or thought was of moment to Katherine Rae. He was also too chivalric not to feel strongly for the innocent girl, condemned to listen in silence, first to ridicule and then to the coupling of her name with a man whom she had known for less than twenty-four hours. Perhaps he ought to have told Miss Thompson at once of the little game Beatrix and he were playing, but had refrained because his instinct made him aware that no explanation would prevent their presence together in a dark room from becoming fertile gossip in Miss Thompson's hands. Although his main consideration was for the girl, it must be confessed that, deep down in his heart, was the fear that Katherine might hear of it, and his new-born hope of reconciliation be shattered. It seemed to him, also, that it would be safer to leave the initiative to the young Virginian, in whose clever resourcefulness he had much confidence. These conflicting reflections show Montresor to be somewhat of a moral coward; and I must admit that he did not exhibit, in such matters, that pluck and decision which he displayed in presence of physical dangers. His answer,

however, was cool, and showed consideration for Miss Preston, if not for Miss Thompson.

"Mrs. Rae is the only lady whom I know as living in Lafayette Square; and *she*, I am sure, would notice nothing unusual in the intercourse of hostess and guest. If you think that Miss Preston has made special, and successful, efforts to entertain the men, it is because they were less—independent of their hostess than the ladies seemed to be."

As he said this, he made such a vicious attempt to light a second match that he snapped its head off; and in taking a third—the last there was—dropped it and the box on the floor, and had to grope around for them, in which Miss Thompson volunteered to assist him, adding:

"You see, I bear no malice for that dig you gave us; but, really, mamma had a headache this morning, and we did not like to desert her; besides, we knew Miss Preston would have to see after Miss Fairfax and her housekeeping—and *follow the guns*."

"I've got the box; I suppose we'll have to give up the match," said Montresor, who found that, in the search, his hand and that of Miss Thompson would come in contact—a thing which he disliked in that particular instance, whatever would have been his attitude if it had been Katherine—or Beatrix.

"I suppose we must," said Miss Thompson, reluctantly, after one more effort; "and I shall try to find the sideboard in the dark, for I am very thirsty."

In her desire to find the match, or aid Montresor, she had gone on her knees, and had not risen, when there was a sudden rustle at the door; and, looking up, she saw, with a lighted candle in her hand, Beatrix Preston, upon her face a look of surprised



decorum, somewhat modified by the fact that the three-cornered hat, which she had forgotten to remove, had become cocked on one side, giving her entirely too rakish an appearance for a stern censor of morals.

"Miss Thompson!—and Mr. Montresor!" she exclaimed, in modulated astonishment. "All in the dark! It is too bad! What can the servants have done with the candle which I saw here not long ago? Ah! there it is; but it is actually extinguished. I do declare, that is most aggravating!"

Miss Thompson, rising hastily from kneeling before Montresor, appeared somewhat at a disadvantage; the consciousness of which so impaired her temper that her voice was suspiciously defiant as she said:

"I wanted a glass of water, and Mr. Montresor was helping me to get it; and the only match we had dropped on the floor, and Mr. Montresor gave up the search before I did—men are always like that!"

Montresor could see Beatrix's muscles strain with suppressed merriment, but her face preserved its polite gravity; only the arched eyebrows seemed to be asking all sorts of questions.

"How very culpable of me," said she, "not to have told you that we keep the ice-water in a cooler in the hall, almost opposite the parlor door."

As she *had* already told Miss Thompson, this speech did not help much; so the latter sought to effect a diversion:

"I see you have on your riding-hat. Are you going out, when it is already dark?"

Beatrix, blushing, put up her hand; but by the time it had reached her head, she recovered her pres-

ence of mind, and, adjusting the hat, answered, nonchalantly :

"Oh, no, I assure you. But my duties as hostess carry me down into the cellar, and—a hat protects your head, you know."

Montresor was glad Beatrix had evaded this difficulty without telling an untruth, especially as he felt that he wanted this particular truth suppressed at all hazards. Being relieved on this score, he began to wonder how much, if any, of the conversation between Miss Thompson and himself had been overheard, and strove to discover from Beatrix's manner if she had any knowledge of it. In this he was, as may be surmised, totally unsuccessful. She showed not the slightest change in her demeanor toward either of them.

They were about leaving the room in search of water when Montresor, glancing at the pilaster which served as the secret door, noticed that a small piece of lace protruded from the side next to the fireplace, and instantly divined that it had been caught in the door and torn from Beatrix's petticoat when she disappeared with such a snap. The latter young woman, who, of course, knew that she had left a portion of her raiment behind, also saw it at the same time; and, though neither knew that the other had seen it, the result of their combined efforts was to bounce Miss Thompson out with some precipitancy.

The ladies having gone to their rooms, Montresor returned to the dining-room and, not knowing how to open the door, cut off the obtruding lace with his penknife, so close to the surface of the pilaster that it was impossible to see what remained. Instead of

destroying the piece, however, as would have been the most proper course to pursue—as Sir Charles Grandison would have done—he placed it in one of the compartments of his pocketbook.

When he reached the top of the stairway, Miss Preston came out upon the gallery and moved toward him.

“Oh, Mr. Montresor,” said she, in a voice of hospitable compunction, “I believe I promised to show you the secret door in the dining-room, but I have been too busy to do so. If you are still interested, I will redeem my promise this evening or to-morrow.”

“You did rather leave me in the dark on the subject,” he replied, laughingly.

“*Leave you in the dark!*” came back, in a surprised, serious tone. “*On bended knees*, Mr. Montresor, I beg you not to say such a thing. On the contrary, did I not attend upon Miss Thompson and yourself with a lighted candle?”

Her eyes danced with fun, but she would not remember anything of the incident except what occurred after her reappearance; and Montresor, giving up the attempt, went to his room and she descended the stairs.

When he tried again in the evening by asking if she went all the way to the stable, or only into the cellar, she replied:

“Did you think, like Miss Thompson, that I was going riding in the dark? I was not, I assure you. Besides, I should not have gone to the stable, but had the horse brought to me.”

Then, from his own motive in asking the question, Montresor guessed the probable reason of her evasion, for he had wished to learn how much she had

overheard of the conversation between Miss Thompson and himself. But neither in words nor manner would she give the slightest clue. She wore the same dress as on the previous evening, and bore herself as unconsciously; while her courtesy toward Miss Thompson seemed neither more nor less than before, although that young lady was decidedly more affable.

These later incidents tended to prevent Montresor from dwelling much upon those of the morning, notwithstanding the stimulation of his suspicions by Beatrix's remark about the numbering of Purdy's guns; and, as he had not been thrown with Robinson either in the afternoon or evening, he retired and went to sleep in a matter-of-fact frame of mind which was little short of astonishing, even to himself.

His thoughts were, however, rather rudely started again upon the more morbid path the next morning. As the rain was descending in torrents, preventing all shooting, word was sent to every one that breakfast would be at half-past nine; so by the time Montresor descended the morning mail had arrived and was distributed on a table in the hall. There was a letter for him from the Professor, and beside it, in the handwriting of Mrs. Rae, one for Robinson.

The last named was already at the breakfast-table, having neglected to notice the mail, he said, in answer to Miss Thompson's inquiry, in a knowing tone, as to whether he had received any letters. Upon its being brought to him, he hastily thrust it into his pocket, notwithstanding Miss Thompson's and Miss Marblehead's pointed permission to read it. The

numerous innuendoes which followed were, however, renewed with greater force half an hour later, when Robinson announced to Ridgeway and Miss Preston that he would be obliged to return to Washington immediately.

It is hardly necessary to reiterate the course of Montresor's reflections, except that they were a little more bitter on account of the suddenness of the occurrence and the openness with which Miss Thompson had intimated something more than an ordinary or business interest between Mrs. Rae and Robinson. It is well to note, however, the satisfaction he felt when, late that afternoon, Miss Thompson having said something to the same effect in the presence of Beatrix, the latter remarked:

"It seems to me, Miss Thompson, that if it were from a lady-love, such an unexpected and hurried departure would look as if things were not going smoothly, which, of course, we cannot imagine in Mr. Robinson's case. I rather fear that he did not find the shootin' as good as he hoped."

In this view Mrs. Morton concurred; and, in fact, she had been taking Beatrix's part more decidedly the whole day; which rather increased Montresor's liking for her, while that for the young Virginian assuredly suffered no diminution.

This alliance was not entirely disinterested on Mrs. Morton's part; besides, Beatrix's unfashionable ways did not put her so hopelessly without the pale to a resident of Washington as it did to members of the smart set in New York. For, in the capital, there was still, in those days, a calculable element of comparatively poor and old-fashioned people, but well-born, who were not only treated as

equals by the ultra-gay set, but, to a certain extent, sought after by it.

It is not to be supposed that Beatrix showed any sign of acknowledged inferiority, and her unintentional retorts happened more than once. One of these was especially enjoyed by the Senator and Montresor because the victim was Mrs. Thompson, who, of all the women, had been the most lofty in her bearing.

Beatrix had pointed out some furniture, charmingly full of curves and with carved looped ribbons, as being Chippendale; whereupon Mrs. Thompson, who confused Chippendale with Ince and Mayhew, said, promptly and decisively:

"Pardon me, but there must be some mistake. I know enough to say positively that it is *not Chippendale*."

"Most probably you are right, Mrs. Thompson," was the deferential answer, vastly increasing the other's look of infallibility. "I know nothing about furniture, and I only called it Chippendale because my uncle has shown me the bill for it his great-great-grandfather paid, and that was the name on the bill."

One more feature of this feminine contest must be related on account of its effect upon Montresor. During the whole day Beatrix had been making sudden and somewhat mysterious withdrawals from the company of the others, frequently being summoned thereto by the appearance of Minerva, full of important perplexity.

In the evening the problem was solved, as Beatrix made her appearance with the same dress which she had worn before—frankly, her only one for the

evening—but metamorphosed to some extent by the addition of a ruffle of white lawn around the upper edge of her bodice, falling over it about three inches deep all around. To the uncultivated, or masculine eye, the effect was good, and suggested Venus rising from the foam of the sea, but, to the feminine critic, it was atrocious. It was badly put on, looked (as it was) cheap—cheap as the foam of the sea—and, lastly, was not the fashion; for it had not yet been “revived” by the dressmakers, as was the case a year or two later.

Every one, except Mr. Ridgeway and Beatrix herself, could see the amusement and ridicule with which this effort at embellishment was regarded by the other women; although Mrs. Morton, to do her justice, seemed sorry the child did not have the sense to leave bad alone. Nor could they refrain from what they considered sufficiently veiled attempts to have a little fun with her, notwithstanding their previous ill success in that direction.

Miss Marblehead complimented her upon having a gown which she could be sure every other woman would not have on, and said it would be such an easy costume to get up for a fancy ball.

“Why, surely you could,” was the answer, with beaming gratitude, “and personate your grandmother—when she was a young lady. I copied this from a portrait of *my* grandmother.”

Somehow Miss Marblehead, who had, earlier, with much amused meaning, sung the popular air,

“I took my girl to a fancy ball,  
It was a social hop,”

wished that she had been content with that.

"Lavender is very becoming to you," said Mrs. Thompson, in a manner intended to appear well-meant, as she arrayed the folds of her own handsome gown, which was, however, somewhat reckless in its combination of colors. "One can easily see it is your favorite color."

"Do you know, Mrs. Thompson," was the response, in awed admiration, "I think you are perfectly wonderful to have guessed that, for it *is* my favorite color. Now, I am sure I could never guess *yours* so quickly."

But no retaliatory response was provoked by the older woman's next attack, when, espying a needle, which either Beatrix or Minerva had, in their haste, left in the ruffle, she took it out, leaving the thread dangling, and said as she did so:

"Pardon me, Miss Preston, but I am afraid this may stick into you. It was very careless of your dressmaker to send it like that."

Beatrix flushed furiously, and Montresor thought he detected a quivering at the corners of her mouth, but concluded it was only the beginning of the merry laugh which broke forth as she replied:

"Oh, no! That is Minerva's own best needle. Miss Pinky, our dressmaker, is two days' journey from here, and is, I assure you, too saving a body to send a needle away that had not been duly purchased. She complains most bitterly that, in these days, she cannot make a paper of needles last more than a year."

Every one laughed at this picture of the village dressmaker, and, as Beatrix continued in the best of spirits, and said good-night with her usual gay smile, Montresor went to his room feeling his indig-



nation at the "cattiness" of women was perhaps exaggerated and unnecessary.

Not being disposed to go to bed at once, and having dismissed Mercury, Montresor determined that he would descend to the library to fetch a copy of "Pamela," at which he had been glancing. Taking a candle, he soon found the book, and was on his return when, as he came into the passage leading to his room, he saw, by the light which emerged, that a door, previously closed, had now swung partly open, probably from a faulty lock, quite common in old Southern houses. At the same time he heard the sound of muffled sobbing, and, before he could arrest his steps, saw from whom it came.

Before a blazing fire, which, independently of the candles, brilliantly illumined the room, stood Beatrix, who, having thrown both skirt and bodice in wrathful disorder upon the floor, clung with both dimpled arms to Minerva, on whose broad bosom her head rested in childish abandonment of grief and helpless search for comfort. She seemed so young, in her short white petticoat and bare neck and arms, that it was but natural the maid, who had been her nurse, should stroke her on the back and speak in soothing tones, just as she had done not so very long before.

"Dah! dah! Nevver you mind, honey. Dem ladies ain't no real ladies, if dey set so much sto' by dere clo's. Dat's no better dan a low-country nigger."

"Father was going to get me another dress this year," sobbed Beatrix, "but—he—had—to—pay—fifty—dollars—for—those—hound-puppies. It was so—cruel—of—them—to—expose—me—before the—gentlemen."

Montresor paused in hesitation, fearing, if he passed, he might be seen by Beatrix and cause her additional distress. Eventually he decided to retrace his steps to the library and wait awhile, giving them time to notice the open door. When he returned, Minerva had evidently gone, for her voice was no longer heard, but, as he passed on tiptoe, the plaintive sobbing could be clearly distinguished; and, while he knew the cause of Beatrix's grief was intrinsically absurd, a great wave of warm pity surged through him as he thought of the intrepid gayety with which she had borne herself in the presence of her tormentors, although suffering acutely all the while. In his sympathy for her he quite forgot his own worries; and this was something for which he might be thankful, since, although he was not conceited or, in a narrow sense, selfish, and while, moreover, he was apt—too apt—to look at both sides of a question, yet the fact remained that, for the past six weeks, he had been thinking too much about himself, no matter whether good or bad.

The next day Beatrix was as buoyant as ever; but Montresor had learned her powers of concealment, and thought of the scene of the previous night, even while she was gaily telling him how when she asked Mercury, the atheist, if he wasn't going to church, he had answered:

"No, Miss Trixie; I don't go to church nebber no mo'. To-day, please God, I'se gwine to catch a big bunch ob fish."

He was much with her during the day, feeling a sort of fatherly—*young* fatherly—interest in her, and ready to protect and comfort her, as he had seen Minerva do, without any thought of guile.

It cannot be said that the rest of the party interpreted his motive correctly, and the result was a good deal of more or less mute interchange of comment. Beatrix herself, although pleased and evidently liking him very much, did not seem to misunderstand him; and when, with an air of gallantry, he showed her the piece of lace he had cut from the secret door and said that, like the Prince in the tale of Cinderella, he was going about searching for the lady who had parted with that portion of her apparel, she answered, with unembarrassed raillery:

"You need not go far to seek her, Mr. Montresor, for my maid Minerva has a petticoat with lace exactly to match."

When evening came she appeared again in the criticised gown; but Montresor had confided his experience to the Senator, and he fairly browbeat the women into civil behavior.

Upon the last evening, as on the first, Montresor found himself drinking a toast with Beatrix; and this time she said:

"Here is confusion to your enemies, Mr. Montresor!"

"What makes you think that I have enemies?"

"Every one who has many friends must have some enemies."

"That is a favorite theory of my friend Donelly."

"Then I abandon it," replied Beatrix; although she asked, after a pause: "What is his theory?"

"The necessary association of good and evil principles," said Montresor.

"That explains," exclaimed Beatrix, with some bitterness, "why he and my Uncle George are such friends!"

"Oh, I don't think your uncle is a bad man," was Montresor's teasing reply.

"My Uncle George," said Beatrix, earnestly, "is the best man I ever knew."

"Where do *I* come in?" asked Montresor, laughingly, in the latest American slang.

"Mr. Montresor, upon my honor, I don't believe you know that yourself," was the serious reply.

This was rather startling to Montresor, as it described so accurately his condition; and he was disposed to give Beatrix credit for more penetration than really belonged to her. The truth is, she had heard from her uncle—who had it from Father Vincent—that Montresor showed a tendency toward agnostic views; and this she found inconsistent with a certain habitual reverence for the church and religious people which she had observed in him.

"This Professor Donelly," she went on, "must be a man of most pernicious influence."

"He's the most attractive man I know," replied Montresor, warmly. "I hope some day you will meet him."

"Indeed, I won't, if I can help it," was the decisive answer; and yet in her eye was again that light of baleful curiosity whereby woman first fell.

As they parted the next day, her last words were: "Fortiter, Fideliter, Feliciter," said with smiling audacity. It was a quotation from a novel called "Kismet," which had penetrated to the most remote corners of the South, and of which she had said every true man ought to make it his motto.

What did she mean? he asked himself as they drove off—and yet he knew. But his thoughts were not of himself; and many a time as, in memory, he

saw her again standing in her picturesque riding hat and habit, all alone on the great portico, he wondered what her life would be. He knew it would be lived bravely and faithfully—but happily? There was an expression of mute wistfulness in her slight figure which made him pause ere he added that word.

## CHAPTER XVII

### WINE, WOMAN AND SONG

FOR two or three days after his return to Washington Montresor felt the self-detachment wrought by his visit to Sudley; but it was not in the nature of things this should continue. The struggle going on within him was too vital for that; and, without seeking it, he had new material for distressingly suggestive thoughts. One was, as he learned through chance remarks of friends, that Mrs. Rae had suddenly shortened her visit to New York and been at home the morning Robinson returned from the South, when, as will be remembered, he had been seen at the door of Singleton's house.

Another fact was communicated by the real estate agent, who wrote that a deed of the mortgaged property from Mrs. Weeks to Mrs. Rae, for "one dollar and other considerations," had just been recorded, the evident object of which was to avoid danger of being over-bid at a mortgage sale, and that he hoped Montresor's friends had arranged with Mrs. Rae before this transaction had been consummated.

But that which most effectually threw him back into his old state of intolerable doubt and questioning was an indefinable something in Mrs. Rae's own manner toward him when they met at dinner the second evening after his return. They had always so

well preserved the conventionalities of intercourse, when thrown together, that a stranger would not have guessed there was anything strained in their relations. Their conversation, when they were forced to such a demonstration, proceeded with the modulated and equal tick-tack of a drawing-room clock. But, through it all, Montresor had felt that, though there was a barrier between them, Katherine had not resigned herself to it any more than he, and at any moment might say to him: "Let us tear it down and trample it under foot." This was no longer so. The few words they exchanged, first in the hall, as they were removing their wraps, and afterward on the edge of a general group, were, as far as Katherine was concerned, not a whit more commonplace—perhaps a trifle less so; her voice, too, was pitched in a more interested key. Nevertheless, there was—whether in speech or face or figure, he could not say, probably in all—something which told him she never regarded as possible any other condition of affairs than that which now existed between them.

With this realization there came to him the dread that her strong interest in another had cut him off so completely; and back in the ultimate recesses of his consciousness was a formless, threatening blackness which only constant and strenuous exertion of will prevented from shaping itself into the image of the man he most detested. He would not believe it possible of Katherine; but he could imagine such a capricious and astounding choice in another woman, even though endowed with those perfections which his fancy, or his wish, had given to her. In fact, the world was full of such foolish mismating. The

unnamed evil which menaced him seemed all the greater from the fact that he had very good reason to believe this man, who was Katherine's friend, lobbyist, perhaps lover, had deliberately tried to kill him in a most cowardly manner; for Montresor still felt he had grounds for believing this, although, with that infirm tendency of his to consider the other side, he admitted to himself that perhaps Robinson had lied about the length of time he had owned a hammerless gun merely to excuse possible bad shooting; and, of course, the discharge of the gun might have really been an accident. Still, as far as Montresor's feelings were concerned, Katherine had heaped additional outrage upon their former friendship by taking up with this fellow, just as much as if his attempt to kill had been proven and known to her.

So, with that instinct, of brute origin, which makes us, when in a rage, bite into our own flesh, he again proceeded to retaliate upon Katherine's attitude by renewed attention to Mrs. Morton.

On her part, the last named showed no resentment at his fitful regard, but invariably treated him as if, while having a claim upon his devotion, she would never assert it unless he showed some sign of acknowledgment. She had, too, behaved with tact while at Sudley, never intimating that she supposed his attentions to Beatrix meant more than politeness toward a young hostess who was also attractive and amusing. She had, besides, been the only woman to refrain from disregard and ridicule of her—on the contrary, more or less actively deprecating it. All this, and the unquestioned devotion between her



little daughter and herself, seemed to indicate a really warm heart—which covers a multitude of sins.

So, to a great extent he relaxed in that evident persiflage by which he had maintained his distance, and indulged in adroit speeches which, while not untrue, allowed untruthful implications of a serious devotion. Strange as it may appear, despite all there was to indicate that Mrs. Morton was accustomed to affairs of gallantry, Montresor became almost persuaded that she was really in love with him, and that there had not been other men before him, while he thought he saw evidence of a struggle against her passion. She frequently told him how she was misunderstood—she was gay and careless of what people said—and did thus and so because she knew, herself, she was doing no harm, and, therefore, did not think other people would look at it differently. Montresor had often said, "I have seen modest women who were not good, but never a good woman who was not modest." No one, certainly, would call Mrs. Morton very modest; and yet, as we have indicated, he brought himself to believe her love for him was causing her thoughts, for the first time, to swerve from her duty toward her husband.

He had been dining at the club with a man just returned to Washington, after a couple of months' absence, whose allusions to Mrs. Rae, in ignorance of changed conditions, caused Montresor some embarrassment and much bitterness of thought. In consequence he, although ordinarily abstemious, emptied, with a feverish thirst, the glass automatically filled by the waiter. While not becoming tipsy, he took enough to accentuate his depression.

After dinner, unfortunately, he had promised to

drop in to have "a little quiet chat" with Mrs. Morton. He found her beautifully arrayed for a musicale to which they were going later. The bodice of a severely plain gown followed so faithfully the modeling of her perfect figure as to almost make necessary the delicate lace boundary which marked where it merged with the satiny whiteness of her neck, while the frequent, careless disarray of the narrow shoulder-bands suggested still more indulgent opportunities for admiration. Montresor thought, as she advanced to meet him, that he had never seen her looking so well; and the brilliant sparkling of her eyes seemed, in a manner, to indicate her consciousness of it.

There was a decanter on the table in the drawing-room, and, after having filled a glass, she handed it to Montresor, saying:

"This is some brandy we have a chance of buying, and I want your opinion of it."

Montresor tasted it, smacked his lips, and drank it off. It was wonderfully good.

"By Jove!" said he, "I have rarely tasted anything approaching it. You are fortunate to get it."

She pressed him to take another, but he begged that he might do so later.

"That means you don't really like it. But you can't refuse to finish this for me."

Saying which, she drank part of a glass which she had filled for herself, and handed it to him. From politeness, or because, like the apple of Eden, "it was good," he took the glass and did as he was bidden. Then, giving an exclamation as to her forgetfulness regarding a very important note, Mrs. Morton summoned the butler, by whom she sent it to a

somewhat distant part of the town, with instructions to wait for an answer.

She gave a little sigh of relief, mixed with pleasure, as she said:

"*Now* we can have a very nice little chat before we go to Watman's; only, if any one comes to the door, we shall have to answer it ourselves, as all the servants, except the cook, are out, and poor Mr. Morton's eyes are bandaged up so that he could not do it."

"What is the matter with his eyes?" asked Montresor.

"Oh, didn't you know? He has a cataract, poor man, and the doctors are going to operate on him some time this week. He has to sit with his eyes all bandaged up. Wait a minute and I will go and start him playing on the piano—you are fond of music, I know—and we'll be sure he is not getting into any mischief."

She gave a significant look which jarred somewhat upon Montresor's newly received theory about her innocence. He could hear, from a neighboring room, her words of perfunctory solicitude, and felt a shiver—half of disgust, half of expectation—as she urged her husband to amuse himself by playing on the piano.

They took their seats on a luxurious divan, placed in a large bay-window, which, with its numerous soft cushions, gave one the sense of resting upon clouds of delicate perfume, and was the culmination, or vanishing point, of a subtle voluptuousness pervading the room.

Katherine's cool abandonment of him, the dulling of sense, and stimulation of senses wrought by wine,

his moody thoughts upon the rottenness of it all, as he walked through the gloomy night, and, finally, the appreciation and eager warmth of his reception by a beautiful woman, all conspired to create an atmosphere of fatalistic, unquestioning acceptance of the joys of life as well as of its pains.

Still, he paid her compliments and implied things with an easy assumption which a more exacting woman might have found scarcely satisfactory; but Mrs. Morton evidently meant to be pleased, and to please, that night. As she sat upon the divan, half-recumbent, her gown, of light material, and scant skirts, clung to her figure in a manner which left few outlines to be imagined, while the arm on the side next to Montresor was thrown over her head, framing her lovely face, with its firmly rounded symmetry, but scarcely adding to the modesty of her posture.

He was close beside her, toying with a fan which lay in her lap, when she, with a half attempt at taking it, let her hand lie for a few moments against his, and then, warm and nervous, it lay tremblingly within. As if some evil genius were presiding over the destinies of all, there came from the piano, in the neighboring room, played with wonderful expression, the subtle and sensuous airs of "Faust," "Lohengrin," or "Tannhäuser," thrilling every nerve to intense vibration and setting the brain on fire. Montresor, drunk with the fumes of a wicked enchantment, drew her unresistingly toward him; and she let the arm which had been raised above her head fall half around his neck, while she turned toward him a flushed face and eyes that gleamed like stars. As he looked at her he could see her bosom pulsate

gaspingly; and then, with an access of recklessness, her lips sought his, while he could feel a quiver of excitement run through her frame. . . .

And now the music, which, for a few moments, had been wandering through strange, low modulations, slowly—mysteriously almost—assumed a shape. It was as if, from the waves of sound, which rose and fell in the sad, sweet cadence of a moonlit ocean, there emerged some pure, radiant spirit, clad in soft raiment—a lacework of harmony, inexpressibly fragile and beautiful—and turned to him a face full of gentle reproach and earnest entreaty. It was the melody which he had heard called Katherine's, but transfigured by the touch of genius and by the intensity of his unconquerable longing. It was Love, the foster-brother, but master, of Passion, which had come to dominate.

The music rose and fell and surged about him, penetrating his whole being, awakening into life all that was strong and good within him. The hand which before had felt warm, moist, and tender, now seemed to him hot, clammy, and clutching. Blessed with a new vision, the flushed cheek and lustrous eye seemed but the painted beauty and bold gaze of an adventuress. He felt, with all its force, the low, cruel treachery of the woman, who could so calmly take advantage of her husband, even of his most pitiable misfortune, and he thought of his own willing share in it with even more disgust.

In a voice that was intended to be most soft and alluring, she said to him:

"My love has made me your slave, Arthur. You must not misuse your power."

With his brain in a condition of intense activity,

there flashed upon his remembrance those self-same words, quoted by Robinson, at the club, in a jocular conversation about women; and, in an instant more, he recalled the quiet, unexacting intimacy of their intercourse, and it pointed them out, as in clairvoyant vision, to be the two whom he had seen in G Street. There was no pang of jealousy in all this. The recollection only came to augment his loathing for all that the woman embodied—of calculating falseness and treachery. It was not that the sound of music had made him a different man; it had simply been the signal for all within him that was manly and true and noble to assert itself.

He started from the divan, almost roughly freeing himself, and stood before her, cool and impassive as a statue. She, with only the vulgar instinct and apprehension of a surprise, glanced toward the door, at the same time—with a perfect coolness which spoke volumes—quietly, but quickly, altering her position into one more conventional.

"No," said Montresor, "there is no one coming. I was only startled by the *novelty* of your avowal. To think that, perhaps, there may be only four or five men to whom you have said that before! Indeed, I only know of *one*—Mr. Robinson, I mean—who has had the honor of that identical phrase before me."

This sounded, at first, to Mrs. Morton, simply like the thrusting of a jealous man; and she smiled with triumph, knowing that jealousy was but an indication of the power she had. Another moment, however, and her practiced eye saw that the perfect coolness and poise of the man before her was far different from the madness of jealousy. She had

felt, too, not the power of the music, but its change, and, most of all, she had felt the change in Montresor. Attempting a little silly bravado, she answered:

"Oh, you know, as Murray says, 'the last man is always the first.'" She tried to say it scornfully, but it sounded only light and foolish.

"Mrs. Morton," he said, paying no attention to her remark, "I am not the man to preach you, or any one, a sermon, but still I feel like doing it, and to myself, at the same time—not the sermon of a good man, but the sermon of a man of the world, which, to us, means a bad one. I am not quite such a cad or hypocrite as to cant about any vows you may have made to the man in the room yonder."

"Well, what *are* you going to preach about?" said Mrs. Morton, in a harsh voice.

"I'm only going to indulge in a bit of prophecy. I see a vision, as the prophets say, of a woman who continues to find men—like myself, for instance—with whom to amuse herself, as she thinks, and who amuse themselves with her, as they think; but gradually they will be of a lower and lower class. Presently her complexion will fade, her eyes become less fetching, and she will tinker herself up with paint. She tries, also, to eke out matters by captivating boys, who, having just tasted society, wish the *éclat* of an intrigue. Soon even they will fail, for her beauty will be gone, and it will be generally known that her affections—have not been confined within narrow limits."

"That is," interjected Mrs. Morton, "they have not been confined to some man, like yourself!" Her laugh was mocking, yet uneasy. "But go on! I'm

interested in this deplorable specimen of a deplorable sex. Do you see more punishment for her on earth, or does Man turn her over to his Bishop co-adjutor in hell?"

Montresor was nettled by this imputation that he was Satan preaching against Sin; because it was true, and also because one always resents a sharp retort from a person not considered clever. With increased warmth, therefore, he replied:

"Yes, she has a punishment—one which, I think, will excite your sympathy. Strange to say, it comes through the greatest, purest love of her existence." At these words Mrs. Morton's manner of reckless derision changed to foreboding dismay, and, as he continued, it increased into the keenest distress.

"She will look into the face of her child, perhaps a daughter, and there, as in a magic mirror—you know, all soothsayers have magic mirrors—she will see the seed of treachery she herself has planted grow into her own image. One day, as some new man becomes her exclusive caller, she will see the child pondering as to what it means—Eve's curiosity; and another day will come when the mother will know that the curiosity has been gratified—that in some fair, smiling Eden, flowing with wine and money, the daughter has eaten the fruit which brings knowledge of good and *evil*." Mrs. Morton gave a gasp of inarticulate reply; but Montresor hurried on: "No! Let me finish! The mother knows that the cub of a boy who returned the courtesy of Eve to Adam in presenting the forbidden fruit, has not learned from Coquelin the *moralité* of the Crow and the Cheese fable, 'If you would enjoy the cheese, you must not open your mouth.' And the poor



mother will vainly try to prevent the palpable disgrace of her child.

"You wish the *moralité* of my own fable? If any woman would be happy—even what *we* call happy—she must be true to some one; whether husband or lover, there must be *some one* who can trust her."

The effect of this speech upon Mrs. Morton had been so profound that Montresor almost regretted it; and his voice, as he closed, far from being denunciatory, was well nigh pleading in its tone. That maternal instinct which sometimes betrays woman into lawless indulgence, but far oftener ennobles and saves, was strong in this poor creature, and it now arose to lay the lash upon her conscience, more cruelly than would any mere tinkling words of copy-book morality.

She had risen, and unconsciously assumed a posture almost of cowering supplication; but, as Montresor finished, her form stiffened, and, following the direction of her horrified gaze and outstretched arm, he saw Mr. Morton standing in the doorway.

One hand grasped the casing, so high as to suggest it was for support rather than guidance, and, while the lines about his mouth were tense, the eyes and brow being masked, no decisive impression could be formed, either as to the nature or strength of his emotion. Whether he was only a sympathetic listener or a retributive judge was inscrutable, and allowed a racking struggle in the wretched wife's breast between alternate hopes and fears. But she was moved by no selfish cowardice, for passionate mother-love ousted all other considerations, leaving her possessed by no thought except to save from impending disaster not only her child, but also its

father, to whom the calamity would be even more overwhelming and irreparable. As he stood there, in an attitude of helpless uncertainty, his physical infirmity aroused a remorseful compassion never excited by that blindness to her faults which had been a secure screen for the reckless pursuit of distraction in which she had indulged. Her impatience with the patient bread-winner had, imperceptibly, grown into a species of contempt, and driven from her narrow heart that love for her husband which now, merged with maternal passion, returned in this supreme moment, and added to her torment, as she thought of him, with failing sight, toiling deep into the night, to provide pleasures for their daughter and herself. In this inspired exaltation, it would have been an infinite relief could she have made a frank avowal of her undutifulness; but she realized, with an access of humiliating pain, that the instinct of concealment and deception, which came so readily, was the right one; that otherwise her child's—*their* child's—life would be wrecked, and her husband pointed at, derisively, as one betrayed, or—even more outcast and unhappy—one who has forgiven. No; she could not tell him the truth, nor yet would she explicitly lie to him; and out of the stress of this situation was born to her a self-control and capacity which astounded Montresor. Her face had a beauty almost of distinction, yet drawn with penitential, pitying fear; while, with one hand clasped over her throbbing breast, and the other pointing to the silent figure, her attitude was eloquent with appeal, not for herself, but for her child and husband. Summoning all her strength, she gave a short laugh, and spoke in a voice which, beneath its tone of ordinary

social banter, had a note of seriousness only for one who could look upon the vibrant emotion of her face and form :

"Really, for a man who can know the bad woman only from hearsay, you have given a very lifelike sketch; but so gruesome, I'm rather sorry I suggested it. Why don't you continue—and tell me about the Good Man and his reward? He is so honorable that, when trusted to enter a friend's house, he scorns to steal his money, even though he can find a foolish or dishonest member of the household to aid him, but doesn't hesitate to steal what is far more precious, and deem himself exonerated, if he finds a silly, or wicked, wife so pliable as to share the crime. Why does a good man always seek a woman's weaknesses for things that are wrong, and never those for what is innocent? Why can he never help her against her own passions? The modern gentleman takes great credit for not shouting his successes on the street corners, but, in the silence of his conscience he, like Adam, excuses himself to God by accusing the woman."

"Surely——" interposed Montresor. But, without heeding him, Mrs. Morton persisted :

"I'm not defending my sex. I know it is a poor creature who, for her own vanity—or perhaps she thinks it is for her children—craves social success, to have which, she must please good men; and she knows this cannot be done by wearing high-necked gowns or drinking lemonade and giving family news. If she degenerates into a condition where she forgets the superiority of her husband, and prefers a man because he is smart, is it fair to scold her for fickleness if she doesn't always prefer the same dress-suit

for companionship? After all, there are really no 'odds in rags.' "

The rasping, contemptuous earnestness with which this was said showed that she had remorsefully in mind the inferiority of most social favorites to her husband, who, besides being handsome and accomplished, had a good intellect, but was too modestly reserved to shine in a self-assertive throng. Throughout, she had sought in his face some clue to the nature of his feelings, but to no purpose. Several times his lips moved as if to speak; but she hastened on, seeming unwilling to hear words which would seal her fate until she had some premonition from his expression.

When she had finished the sentence last quoted, the strained look about his mouth gave place to a gentle smile of amusement, which told at once that he attached no sinister meaning to their discussion. At the same time he started to enter the room, but, tripping, would have fallen, had not Mrs. Morton, brushing Montresor aside, sprung to his assistance, calling him by name in a tone of affectionate anxiety which made him flush with pleasure. So, also, in her reproaches for his incautiousness, and reminder of the surgeon's warning against any sudden shock, there was a tenderness, the more noticeable from the studious repression and curtness of her words.

His purpose in coming had been to ask if she had ordered the carriage, as it would soon be time to start for the musicale. She would gladly, now, have remained at home; but many reasons forbade, the most worthy of which was that she felt unable to endure her husband's pathetic gratitude for her affection, as that made her seem an especially depraved

hypocrite. Besides, it would be difficult to explain to him why she should suddenly renounce an eagerly anticipated entertainment—one given in honor of a German Royal Prince, where the best singers would appear, and, finally, to which there were only a half-hundred invitations. That the obligation to be seen at such an exclusive affair should occur to her at this time was characteristic, but not exceptional. Few of us have not had, when in the grip of great emotion, some trifle of daily concern obtrude itself—some well-worn, fantastic wooden god claim our obeisance, with familiar grin. Telling her husband he must entertain Montresor while she got ready, Mrs. Morton started to leave the room; but, the strain she had undergone now taking effect, she was attacked by faintness, and, staggering to a sofa, threw herself upon it almost in collapse. Montresor, being forbidden by an imperative gesture to go to her assistance, was obliged to give his attention to Mr. Morton, who, in ignorance of what had happened, proceeded to make conversation:

“I rather think, Mr. Montresor, that our sex was getting the worst of it in the discussion which I interrupted.”

“We are certain to get the worst of it,” Montresor assented, warmly, “whenever any one tells us the truth about ourselves.”

The other continued:

“That was a perfectly sound indictment when Mrs. Morton said we only look for a woman’s weaknesses for things that are wrong——”

From this he launched into uxorious praise of his wife’s attainments, which rendered Montresor’s responses most difficult, and was such pain to her raw

conscience that, making a desperate effort, and supporting herself with one hand against the wall, she finally succeeded in leaving the room.

In full measure Montresor had felt the abasement of his position, when he realized that, after abusing the hospitality of a man who was physically helpless, he could do nothing toward acknowledgment or atonement without becoming still more contemptible. Almost as keen was the pang inflicted by Mrs. Morton's implication that he had hypocritically set himself up to judge her, whereas he had only, in a fit of egotistic resentment, intended to punish her for her deception of himself. Besides, the unmistakable tenderness she had shown for her husband again caused doubts about her depravity to arise in his mind, and he was anxious to apologize for having undertaken to lecture her.

Shallow waters are quickly lashed into fury, but subside with equal facility, and smile placidly at the retreating storm.

When Mrs. Morton reappeared, after twenty minutes' delay, there was little trace of the remorseful paroxysm which had so lately racked her, except that an air of timidity had replaced her habitual eager boisterousness. The very violence with which she had been seized by the best instincts of her nature had a calming effect as, in the quiet of her own room, she looked back upon the scene, and became convinced that the best woman could not have had different feelings from herself. That such an one would not have occasion for similar penitential regrets did not occur to her, as, I think, she had an instinct that even the best women have their bad moments. Indeed, I am not prepared just now to combat the

theory that goodness is arithmetical—that your saint has offended seventy times seven, and your sinner four hundred and ninety-one—and that it is immaterial whether the last unforgivable offense be the theft of a loaf of bread or a diamond, the lust or the broken oath of a bigamist. Thus, I am unwilling to ridicule either the poor woman's self-approval or her self-confidence; but that, therefore, she need have no fear for the future, if she should *chance* again to skirt along the danger line, which mischievous thought crept for a moment into her mind, is a fallacy I do condemn. She had been bettered by the ordeal—not changed. In truth, the very extremity of her moral exaltation caused, when the reaction came, a certain inertness, making it easy for her normal modes of thought to assert themselves. She resolved to exclude some objectionable associates of her daughter—if it could be done without affront to their parents. The sight of her husband's splendid figure, clothed in an old-fashioned, rusty broad-cloth suit—the same he had worn when they were first married—smote her with tender compunction; and she resolved to get him a new one, by foregoing real lace on the gown just ordered and substituting imitation—Irish lace was becoming fashionable. She did not care a rap for Montresor now; but it was just as well not to let him think too ill of her.

As soon as they were in the carriage, Montresor said:

"Mrs. Morton, I want to say that, no matter what provocation a man has—or thinks he has—it is behaving like a cad for him to undertake to lecture any woman, and I am sorry I made such a fool of myself."

"I don't blame you," said she, "for saying what you did, if you really thought that of me. It's no use trying to make you believe anything good of me, after finding me so weak and criminal—I despise myself for it; but I ought to say that never in my life have I used those words that angered you so much—to Robinson or any one. If he quoted them, he got them out of a French novel everybody was reading a year ago, in which there is something like that. Of course, it's very hard for me to say this, but it's better than to let a chance coincidence of words give you any such impression as you seem to have. Why, I should have thought you could see we were only ordinary acquaintances——" Then, with sudden energy: "When have you ever seen anything that looked like intimacy between us?"

Montresor disliked anything like a real *rapprochement*, which this conversation might lead to; but the challenge offered too good an opportunity to be neglected, so he responded:

"Of course, I don't say he is an intimate friend, if you say he isn't; but I did think, from your general manner with each other, that you knew him pretty well. For instance, I remember seeing you together several weeks ago in G Street, walking very slowly and talking very confidentially—at least, so it seemed in the dusk."

"Well, now! That's a very good specimen!" replied Mrs. Morton, with some animation. "Would you like to know what we were talking about?——"

Although this was a purely rhetorical question, Montresor was hastening to assure her he had no such desire; but she continued:

"Well, it was simply that he wanted me to put



some money in that syndicate company; said I should go in 'on the ground floor'—why not the cellar, I asked him—it was sure to make tremendous profits, and all such stuff. But I didn't want to be under obligations to that kind of man, so I just put him off about it. He had only joined me as I was coming back from a visit to Ethel Blake; so I went on home, and he went into his own house, I suppose. *Now*, do you see anything intimate in that?"

Montresor was so pleased at her confirming him as to Robinson's companion in G Street that he was not disposed to be hypercritical, and readily confessed that there was not.

Fortunately for him, they were now approaching the Watman's house; and, although Mrs. Morton's complete forgiveness seemed not unattainable, he was able to postpone asking for it until there was, obviously, no time for such a conversation.

The music had not begun when they entered; and it happened they were at once thrown in a group of which one member was Mrs. Rae, toward whom Montresor, naturally, after having his mind disabused about the G Street incident, had cause for a conciliatory feeling, which she could neither be aware of nor share. It is true that she had first denied walking with Robinson, and tacitly admitted it the next day; so, either way, she had told him an untruth. But he found it made a great difference which way the untruth ran; and he could view her saying that she had taken the walk, when she really had *not*, much more tolerantly than the reverse. There was still the syndicate affair, and her flippant and indifferent treatment of himself; but all might be explicable, just as this first trouble had been.

He perceived at once that, whatever change there might be in his own feelings, there was none upon Mrs. Rae's part, for the invisible barrier was still there; in fact, the only weak spot seemed to have been repaired to her full requirements, leaving her free to converse without fear of foray.

Of course, after what had passed between Mrs. Morton and himself, there was some restraint, although they did not betray it to others; so Montresor found himself in the rather unusual position of conversing, in an easy but commonplace style, with two women in the same group, for one of whom he had an ardent admiration, and for the other a suddenly developed, but, perhaps, long latent repugnance.

He thought of this as he walked to his rooms, and said aloud to himself, in the loneliness of the deserted street:

"Well, I *have* made a d——d mess of things!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A REMINISCENCE OF SUDLEY, AND SINGLETON'S SPEECH.

AT one time during the musicale Montresor had found himself seated near Senator Ronderson, who, as he was going off for a smoke, had been fastened upon by the wife of a foreign Minister.

Alvary had just sung Siegmund's Love Song. The singer and accompanist had been as one, bearing the audience with them as they seemed to be swept along, first in the calm, unconscious beginning of love, gliding with sweet cadence from one gentle experience to another—the same, but more enthralling—until, amid the thrashing of stinging-hot staccato notes, they were seized by a whirling, heaving, tumultuously cumulative storm of passion.

The Senator joined in the enthusiastic applause; but when it had subsided, he said, in answer to a remark of his companion:

"All the same, when we were down at Sudley, there was a little Virginia girl, Ridgeway's niece, who made better music even than that—didn't she, Montresor?"

"No," replied Montresor, seriously; "not *better* music, but music which I would rather hear."

And, in truth, just then he had an inexpressible longing for the simpler life, and thought of their

recent visit to the country. In the struggle of conflicting emotions, renewed by his return to Washington, and daily growing more complex, the untoward events of that visit were temporarily effaced. He remembered not the rush of the shot near his face—only the glorious, crisp morning; the fields gleaming with drops of melting hoar-frost, as with an incrustation of gems; the gray russet background of oak woods and the dark green of the pine; the setters, with feathery tails waving high in air or slowly stiffening into level rigidity with the growing strength of the scent; then a whirling bur-r-r, a shot, and a brown body tumbling through the air, to be borne to him by one of the dogs, with open, smiling countenance. And he remembered Beatrix, as she ordered the dogs with such affectionate knowingness, or moved along through the brush and over logs with easy deftness, followed, with lumbering lunges, by the massive and expostulating Minerva. Whether he thought of her mimicking Mercury or mocking himself, making an innocent retort to Mrs. Thompson, or, with three-cornered hat awry, mutely lecturing Miss Thompson upon the indecorum of being in dark rooms with gentlemen; as standing in white petticoat and weeping in childish, foolish grief upon her nurse's bosom, or all alone upon the great, white portico, there was nothing in any of these memories to give him trouble—or only a ruffling of the pleasant flowing stream, to show that it was real. Whereas, now he had returned to all the bubbling, whirling eddies, which bore him in a confusing rush, round and round, in a futile circle—at one time starting out on a headlong chase of pleasure, only to be ar-

rested with a sudden wrench by some forgotten mooring of principle.

On the following morning he was reflecting upon his behavior of the night before, with little consolation as to its showing.

"By Jove!" he said to himself. "What a cad and a prig, rolled into one, I made of myself! I feel just as low as if I had 'kissed and told.' The best thing for me, probably, would be to take the next French steamer and go to Cannes or Monte Carlo—but I can't!"

In the morning's mail there was a note in an unfamiliar female handwriting, which he opened with some curiosity. It was from Mrs. Ronderson:

"DEAR MR. MONTRESOR:

"Miss Preston, who you met at Sudley, is coming to make us a little visit. We want her to meet her friends here, and hope you will dine with us, very informally, at half-past seven, Thursday next.

"Yours cordially,

"SUSAN RONDERSON."

He had been wishing himself at Sudley, and now the vital spirit of the place was coming to him; but would it bring even the temporary surcease of sorrow which he had found there? That was to be seen.

He immediately dispatched a note accepting the invitation, and, after making some alterations in his engagement-book, wrote another, as follows:

"MY DEAR MRS. HEIGHTON:

"One cannot trust to one's memory, even in Lent. I find, upon a tardy inspection of my engagement-

book, that I am to dine at Senator Ronderson's on Thursday, the 2—, which I believe, is the date for which you so kindly invited me, and which pleasure I am now obliged to forego. I wish the law of 'previous engagements' was not so inexorable, or else that one could have a faculty of prescience, when attractive invitations were coming.

"Trusting you will deem the loss I shall suffer sufficient punishment for my carelessness, and will not add the weight of your displeasure,

"Yours regretfully,

"ARTHUR MONTRESOR."

When he met Mrs. Heighton that same evening, she said :

"I am so sorry you cannot come to us. There seems to be some fatality about the Ronderson dinner and ours. I got a note from Von Gluckauf, not so charmingly written, however, as yours, and he, too, has only to-day discovered he had a 'previous engagement' with them. On top of that, Mrs. Rae writes, frankly, asking me to let her off, as the Rondersons are particularly anxious she should meet Miss Preston, for whom the dinner is given. Is she so wonderfully attractive? I hear she is rather pretty, but not very good style."

"Well—she is—different from most people, which, I suppose, you would call bad style."

Montresor was partly sorry and partly glad to hear that Mrs. Rae was to be at the dinner and was taking such trouble on Beatrix's account. He felt it would be awkward for himself, in some ways, but was pleased the young girl was to have, apparently, the countenance and support of a woman of such

social power. And he rejoiced, too, in the fact that Katherine was to do this kind action. It really seemed another step toward regaining his old ideal of her.

I shall attempt at this time no analysis of the precise state of Montresor's feelings toward these two women. Katherine was beautiful, clever, and of great social prestige; was favored, moreover, by the strong loyalty of his nature—a most pronounced characteristic. Beatrix was a pretty country girl, who had excited his interest because she was being pecked at by the other women, and he felt a chivalric sense of protection toward her. He had been thrown with her less than a week, and yet—but we all know how those child-women artlessly stray into our hearts, and then no amount of tactful suggestion will oust them; they stay on, with placidly heedless content.

That which actually occupied Montresor mostly was a second stage in the legislative conflict he was waging with Robinson. Although his dislike of this man had originally sprung from his passion for Katherine, there seemed to be times when his repugnance for the one completely eclipsed all image of the other. So, for some days he thought less of her or of Beatrix than of the success of Singleton's Spanish Claim bill, which, he learned, Robinson, although outwardly urging, was secretly trying to kill, because the big appropriation it called for would probably prevent one for the syndicate. Nor did his friendship or gratitude toward Singleton and Ronderson, who were favoring the Extradition Treaty, add much to the interest with which he took his seat in the gallery of the House on the appointed day.

Baffling Robinson was the real thing. He had not been seated long when Mrs. Rae and some friends came into the Diplomatic gallery; and a few minutes later Robinson entered with a Secretary of a South American Legation. One of Mrs. Rae's party had motioned Montresor to join them; but he declined, with a nod indicating he must remain with his companion. This was a Mr. Atkinson, who, as frankly stated by Singleton, who introduced him, was the attorney, or lobbyist, employed by the Claim beneficiaries, and could, by his knowledge, assist the Englishman in understanding what was said and done. He was to get twenty-five per cent. commission, and, as the claim was for several millions, his share ought to make him a rich man. When Montresor looked at his somewhat shiny black coat and frayed linen, he could not help saying that, if he himself could get one such fee, he would rest content for the remainder of his days.

"So should I," mournfully responded Atkinson, "if I got it all; but it will have to be divided with the lawyers and agents all over the world, who get the business for me—and, then, the expenses of conducting such a claim in Washington are enormous."

"Expenses?" asked Montresor.

"Legitimate expenses, of course, I mean," the other replied, with unmodulated voice.

"Would you mind telling me what are considered legitimate expenses?"

"W-e-l-l," drawled Atkinson, "canvas-back ducks and champagne, for instance—ducks are eight dollars a pair this winter. Just to think!—in my father's time, twenty years ago, when we first commenced on this Claim, ducks could be had for two



dollars, and Members didn't know the difference in vintages of champagne." His voice took a pathetic, yearning tone as he said this.

"I see," said Montresor, laughing, "life is not all 'beer and skittles' with you, but sometimes champagne and poker."

Montresor had mentioned poker simply as an equivalent for skittles; but Atkinson looked at him steadily a moment, and then, in a dreamy manner, said:

"Well, I *have* heard of that game being played after supper, and it is said to be astonishing how some Members of Congress have a faculty for calling a bluff when it is made by their *host*. Your English statesmen don't seem to have as good card heads as ours. As I remember it, both Pitt and Fox lost heavily at cards. Now, with us, when an important Member of Congress loses at poker, it somehow seems out of drawing, so to speak."

"By 'important' you don't mean your leading men?"

"Oh, no," was the reply; "I mean the men who have not made up their minds—men who see both sides of the question, and who, like Alfred Vargrave, see the shield, in the story of the knight, at the same time 'both golden and argent.' By the way, it's something of a coincidence that our currency is based upon both gold and silver—no connection, of course, but still a coincidence."

Montresor laughed at the whimsicalities of his companion, and, seized with a spirit of confession, remarked:

"Fox and Pitt, if they didn't have luck at cards, had their 'important men' to deal with, whom they

decided with fat sinecures—and, I must say, something of that sort still goes on.”

“How nice it must be,” said Atkinson, wistfully, “to have that sort of argument to use. One advantage is that if, after receiving them, the legislator becomes illogical, they can be withdrawn—but you can’t do that with ducks and champagne. These are not the days of Roman feasts. Our bill is on at last.”

They were obliged to listen, at first, to a man who was opposing the bill. This he did, principally, upon the ground of the general extravagance into which the country was rushing. He even instanced the recklessness with which pensions were being granted, saying:

“Why, Mr. Speaker, we have one case of a pension being granted to a man long after the war because he got some physician to say a disease of the heart had been brought on by his running away at the battle of Bull Run——”

“Will the gentleman allow me to ask a question, Mr. Speaker?” said another Member.

“Certainly,” replied the one who had the floor.

“Then will he tell me if he knows of a single man in our army who didn’t run on that day—unless he was dead?”

There was a general laugh at this retort; but the man who had made it did so in a cross, snappish voice, which caused a faint smile to appear on Atkinson’s face.

“Too bad! too bad!” he said. “He’s gone and riled one of the men on his own side. That man who asked the question we counted as dead sure against us. A little more, and he will come over to our side. You see, he was a claim agent before he

was elected Congressman, and he got that very claim passed."

They had good seats, and were able, by diligent attention, to hear what was said; but all the time there was a continuous rustling of papers at the desks of the Members; a confused murmur of their conversation, and, almost every minute, a clapping of hands, which Montresor, at first, thought was applause, but learned was a signal for one of the pages—a number of whom sat near the Speaker's desk—to come for some errand. He supposed, when Singleton began to speak, this would cease; but it did not. About forty Members gathered near him, and the official stenographic reporter stood within a few feet of him, to write down what he should say; otherwise, there was no difference in the House.

Singleton had a fine voice, was tall, distinguished in appearance, and his speech, for directness and soundness of reasoning, fertility of illustration, and eloquence of expression, would have compared favorably with the best orators of the English House of Commons; but Montresor could not help being struck with the difference of its environment and reception. As Bridgmond had said, the sporty element was lacking. Singleton was not a gladiator put forward by the Government to champion the bill against all comers, whose failure would mean the fall of half a dozen men renowned over the whole world. Nor had his opponent shown any of that aggressive personal vitality which may be seen any day in the House of Commons when a Member of the Opposition is badgering the Government. If Singleton failed, he could say, with the Irishman,

"Nothing is lost but honor," while his antagonist would have gained not even that.

The person most acutely affected by the outcome of the vote would be Atkinson; and he sat there with pale, freckled face, red hair *en brosse*, and lounging posture, the picture of careless unconcern. He might have been playing a game of checkers, merely listening, temporarily, to the irrelevant conversation of a couple of friends, after which he would go on with the game.

When Singleton had been speaking about fifteen minutes, however, there began to be a change. Slowly, at first, almost imperceptibly, his audience became larger and more attentive; the clapping of hands ceased, except after some telling point; Members came out of the lobby and took their places; and the coming and going, which had before been ceaseless, both on the floor and in the gallery, was now replaced by a rapid influx of persons who remained as attentive and enthusiastic auditors. It had become known that a great speech was taking place, and people flocked from all parts of the Capitol, the first, among many Senators, being Ronderson.

The indifference shown to the beginning of his speech had stung Singleton hotly; not on account of his vanity, for he knew the habits of the House; but because it treated slightly a stain upon the national honor. This feeling had given him that personal, aggressive, fighting blood, which was all that was needed to convert him from merely a fine orator into an eloquent debater. His sarcasm had a truer edge, and his pathos became more human. He grew in the power, persuasiveness and brilliancy of his appeal, and for nearly an hour seemed to carry his

whole vast audience with him. His closing words were in a voice ringing and vibrant with emotion:

"Remember, we are not here to pass upon the *merits* of this Claim—that was done fifty years ago by our own courts; we stand here simply as delinquent debtors, who, during three generations, have postponed payment, while from our bursting pockets we have scattered money in reckless, futile extravagances. The original claimants, after pitiful years of waiting and trust in us, are now all dead; and their orphans' orphans are before us, timidly asking that we give them back their own. It has been said that 'republics are ungrateful'—let us not have the world point to us with scorn and say they are also dishonest!"

This was followed by a storm of applause, which the officers of the House for some time made no attempt to suppress. On the floor there was a rush to congratulate Singleton, and Montresor was glad to notice among the first and most cordial a Representative from New England, of whose support Singleton had expressed doubts. Glancing toward Mrs. Rae, Montresor found she was looking at him, and, as they gazed for a moment into each other's eyes, they were again upon a footing of sympathetic intimacy.

Atkinson had been clacking his bony hands in rather a perfunctory way, and Montresor, whose enthusiasm had received considerable access by the sight of Katherine's proud and radiant face, said, rather testily:

"Don't you think that a very fine speech?"

"The finest I ever heard," was the response, in

a level voice, even more disappointing than his manual approval.

As he replied he took from a capacious pocket a piece of cardboard, upon which he meant to keep tally of the vote. There was a line drawn down the center, on one side of which he made marks for the ayes, and on the other side the nays, thus:

AYES	NAYS

so that each moment he knew how the vote stood.

Singleton's speech appeared to Montresor so overwhelming, and the applause so universal, that the vote seemed but a legal superfluity. He asked Atkinson if he had any doubt of the result.

"Two or three votes one way or the other," was the laconic reply, as the lobbyist commenced marking the score with the first vote in the negative.

The voting was very evenly divided, first one side of the column and then the other creeping ahead. This was perceived all over the House in a less accurate degree, and the interest was intense. Montresor could see Mrs. Rae leaning over the rail of

the gallery, watching with a face as excited as if she saw the horses in some classic race. This likeness was still further accentuated when Gluckauf, who was of the party, made a remark to Robinson, and, presently, each producing a memorandum book, they apparently registered a bet. The clerk was now calling off the "T's," and the negative was five votes ahead. Then, slowly, with frequent recession, the affirmative begins to gain—it is now in the "W's" and only one vote behind—but it falls back and is three votes behind. Full of chagrin, Montresor looks compassionately at Katherine, while Atkinson coolly tears up the score card and says, in an uninterested voice:

"We win by one vote."

A straight clatter of four "ayes" makes his prediction good.

The applause which greeted the official announcement of the result was tremendous, for the gallery was one-sided. When it had abated, Atkinson turned to Montresor and said:

"After all, oratory *does* have some effect."

"Then you do think that Mr. Singleton's speech won the victory for the bill?"

"Singleton's? No; it was the other fellow's speech that did it. You see, what he said about the heart-disease pension made that man vote on our side, just as I thought it would."

"Do you mean to say," retorted Montresor, somewhat nettled, "that you think a speech which created such a sensation had no effect on the vote?"

"It did have *some* effect," Atkinson replied, imperturbably. "It lost us two votes—in this way: There were two men who, if they voted, would have

to go against the bill; but some friends of mine undertook to keep them down in the restaurant until after the vote was taken. I suppose, however, that word got down there that Singleton was making a great speech, and that brought them up; and so they voted."

Montresor was depressed by this cold-blooded statement; but he remembered noticing that the New England Representative, who had congratulated Singleton so enthusiastically, had, after all, voted against him. Mentioning this to Atkinson, he replied, pointing to a printed list of Members:

"By this, you see, I didn't expect him to vote with us. When I found Singleton was going to sacrifice the post-office in his district to this Member's friends in order to save the Claim Bill, I wouldn't stand it. He would have lost his seat, and he has been too good a friend to me for me to let him sacrifice himself in that way. I told the others this, and they thought the deal was off—besides, I expected to win without those votes."

This loyalty to Singleton seemed incongruous with Atkinson's whimsical cynicism, and, perhaps for that very reason, it gave Montresor a liking for the man, which he would not have thought possible a few moments before. Atkinson's business was the same as Robinson's; only he was in a lower social stratum, and his well-brushed shabbiness of attire contrasted sharply with the other's egregious emblazonry of smartness. Why was one on such distant terms with Fortune, while the other was a jaunty favorite? Was he not kept back by just such scruples of conscience as that which had come to him, so inopportunately, in the matter of this Claim



Bill, and threatened to defeat the work of twenty years? That a man whose trade was in the interested motives of others, should be moved by a disinterested one himself, seemed to be one of those moral reactions in accordance with the Professor's theory.

Any further moralizing upon this subject was interrupted by the sight of Gluckauf in high glee, evidently twitting Robinson about something—probably the bet which had taken place on the result of the vote. Although the latter had officiously pressed forward to congratulate Mrs. Rae, his smile was forced, and he was distinctly annoyed by the German's banter—or something.

"Our friend Robinson," remarked Atkinson, "does not seem to be in his usual I've-got-there state of mind. Mighty sharp fellow, Robinson—just about the slickest claim lawyer in Washington, if I *do* say it, that shouldn't. He goes into all sorts of things, and manages to make them all fit into each other; and as for money, why, he can get it out of anything, just like a conjuror—out of your ear, or your pocket—I believe he could even get it out of *my* pocket. He has the advantage over Midas that his digestion will assimilate any amount of gold, and he will thrive on it. Do you know him very well, Mr. Montresor?"

"Not at all well," replied Montresor, indifferently. "I have only met him casually in society; he practices law in Washington, doesn't he?"

"About like I do," answered the other; "and he learned most of his law in the same way, I expect—by mixing with Members of Congress, who are generally lawyers, and talking law at dinners and sup-

pers. After all, isn't that the way your great English lawyers did, when they 'eat their terms' at the Inns of Court?"

"True," assented Montresor, smiling; "and I suppose your law is as much superior to theirs as canvas-back and champagne are to chops and porter."

"Robinson's ought to be," said Atkinson. "*He* doesn't eat the ducks' *legs* and refuse champagne 'because his doctor has forbidden it.' Well, Mr. Montresor, I must be toddling. I am very glad to have met you, and if I can ever be of any service to you, I hope you'll command me. As you seem to take an interest in this bill on Mr. Singleton's account, if you'll give me your address I'll let you know when it's to come up in the Senate. Ronderson is going to close the debate for us, and his speech will be worth hearing, although it won't be as fine as Singleton's was."

"Then I suppose," said Montresor, sarcastically, "it won't do quite as much harm to the Bill?"

"As to that," responded the other, "in the Senate they don't have to render a daily account to their constituents, as Representatives do; so they can sometimes give way to their own judgment."

## CHAPTER XIX

### BEATRIX AND KATHERINE

PUNCTUAL to the stroke of the clock, Montresor made his appearance at Senator Ronderson's door, meeting, as he did so, Gluckauf coming from the other direction; while, before they heard the shuffle of the butler, a carriage drove up, and Mrs. Rae emerged, accompanied by Singleton. This was quite a surprise, as Katherine was noted for always requiring the full conventional quarter of an hour's grace at dinner. They were admitted, with even more than usual flourish of importance, by a negro butler, who, being from Virginia and having all his life heard of the Prestons as a great family, felt that Beatrix's presence in the house must impress all persons as it did himself.

When they had exchanged greetings in the hall, Mrs. Rae said to Gluckauf and Montresor, collectively:

"It must be very early, since I am here at the same time as two devoted cavaliers of Miss Preston."

It was the first time since their estrangement that she had even included Montresor in any speech which had a personal allusion in it; and, although she looked at the German as she said it, Montresor felt that the greater share was intended for himself. Yet there was a chill in her voice which prevented

his regarding it as any real invitation to renewed intimacy.

When they entered the drawing-room they found Beatrix alone, as, with childish precaution against being too late, she had been dressed and down at least a quarter of an hour before the time. To Montresor's eyes the change in her was startling. She was no longer arrayed in her lavender gown, with its unfortunate ruffle, but wore, instead, a white one of the latest Parisian fashion, fitting her marvelously. She still retained, however, her quaint little company manner in greeting Mrs. Rae.

As the two women stood talking together with an interested constraint—even more evident in the elder—Montresor regarded them with critical eye. Mrs. Rae, always beautifully dressed, wore, for the first time, a Worth gown, pronounced by him the very acme of his art. It was one of those extravagantly simple garbs, the joy of lovers and the despair of husbands. It just missed being what is called a "young" dress, but still made her appear more youthful than Montresor had ever seen her—all but her face. That—despite the smile upon it and the total absence of lines—seemed to indicate a greater difference in years between Beatrix and herself than the seven which really existed. Montresor easily came to a decision as to their relative personal appearance: One was about the prettiest girl he knew, and the other was unquestionably the most beautiful woman. It was easy to see that each of them admired the other—perhaps to a little misgiving disparagement of her own charms.

Mrs. Ronderson and the Senator came down in a few minutes, apologizing profusely, and the guests

for a large dinner party arrived rapidly. Miss Thompson "could not help" complimenting Beatrix on her gown and saying:

"I don't think you wore that at Sudley."

"Didn't I?" was the response. "I'm sorry, for it is my favorite dress. The more so, as I was aided in choosing it by one whose friendship I deem of the greatest moment."

Senator Ronderson, who was standing near, talking to Montresor, said to him:

"Now, that's what I call neat. If you can keep a secret, Montresor, I will explain who that 'friend' is. You see, I was talking with Mrs. Rae about our little Beatrix there, and she said it was such a pity that the Thompsons didn't invite her here for a visit; upon which cue I spoke up, like a little man, and said we'd be delighted to ask her, but—and then I hemmed and hawed, feeling like a fool, and finally blurted out that she didn't have the proper dresses. Then, to keep from seeming more of a fool than I was, I had to go on and tell her about what you saw—the poor child crying about it. Oh, I wouldn't tell who it was that saw it. Well, she bullied me into giving Ridgeway a hint, who didn't seem to have noticed any difference in the dressing of the women. The upshot of it was that, at Mrs. Rae's suggestion, he sent down to Sudley a woman who had a lot of imported dresses. Mrs. Rae pointed out several, but insisted her name shouldn't be mentioned, as she said it seemed such a liberty in a stranger. So, as it stands *officially*, Ridgeway and I made the selections; but—well, you know she doesn't look like a fool; and she's not as much of a fool as she looks."

There was some further delay, and Montresor was talking with Beatrix when the Professor entered, accompanied by a Kentuckian with a long, grizzly beard, who was known all over the country for his racing stable, and had been, some years before, a very good gentleman jockey, but was now much too heavy.

Mrs. Ronderson brought them up and introduced them to Beatrix, but so hurriedly that they were both bowing together as their names were uttered. The Kentuckian, seeing Mrs. Ronderson return to her station near the door, with a few words of stately apology, followed her. Beatrix, looking after him, said to Montresor :

"You see, Mr. Montresor, your friend Professor Donelly wishes to stay no nearer me than I wish to have him."

By a violent effort Montresor, in answer to the Professor's wink, subdued his laughter into a smile, and said, in a dangerous tone :

"I hope he will never be any nearer, when I am about, as you would be absorbed by him."

Giving her head a little toss, she turned to the Professor and said :

"Do you, Mr. Shelby, think Professor Donelly so very fascinating?"

"I am sure," he replied, "that I think quite as much, or more, of him than Mr. Montresor does."

"What do you like about him mostly, Mr. Shelby?" she asked, with innocent desire to fathom this spell.

"To be honest, I think I like him because he goes out of his way to be good to me."

"That's a very proper reason," she said, gravely,

adding, "but his victims seem to be all of your own sex. He is not a favorite with the ladies, I am sure."

"On the contrary," spoke up Montresor, "he is a perfect pet. They all call him 'Fessy' or 'Donney.'"

"Is that really true, Mr. Shelby?" she asked, and without waiting, added: "Do you know him very well?"

"I've known him a long time—*gnothi seauton*," said the Professor, smiling.

Beatrix blushed, looked hard at the Professor, and Montresor could see a momentary twitching of the corners of her mouth as she said:

"It is very unkind of you, Mr. Shelby, to speak in Latin. I am sure you are making fun of me. Mr. Montresor, what does that mean?"

"Well," said Montresor, "a free translation would be: 'The more you know about a man, the less you know *him*.'"

"I suppose," replied Beatrix, "what Mr. Shelby meant was, that the more one knows about Professor Donnelly the less one wishes to know him."

Montresor indulged in an open laugh at this; but the Professor perceptibly winced, and said:

"That is not exactly what I meant, but I suppose it is so; all the same. It seems, however, Miss Preston, that you didn't have to wait for any knowledge of him for that feeling."

"Mr. Shelby, I knew that he was an atheist. But since seeing him, I must confess it seems to me impossible—he looks as if he had too much sense, as if he were too much of a real man."

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\* Greek: Know thyself indeed.

The Professor seemed to be taking these reproofs more to heart than could have been expected, and if it had not been for unwillingness to seriously disconcert Beatrix, Montresor would have told her the mistake she had made. As it was, while waiting for the signal to go in to dinner, she managed to get in several sharp little speeches regarding the insincerity of the agnostic's "I don't know" (which had been pleaded) and of "the shame" and responsibility of corrupting younger men than himself, or "those like poor Mercury, my Uncle George's negro body-servant, who, possibly, 'don't know' even as much as an agnostic."

This reference to Mercury seemed to astonish the Professor very much, and pain him even more, seeing which, Montresor broke in with:

"I am tired of the rôle of Devil's Advocate, Miss Preston! You ought to say all this to the Professor, and see if he couldn't find some excuse for himself, instead of being struck dumb, like his friend Shelby."

"It would distress me exceedingly," she replied, "to say any such thing to the friend of my Uncle George; but some one ought to make him see that he should consider others—just as a man who has some deadly, contagious disease. It's bad enough to have it himself; he ought not to give it to others."

"He ought to isolate himself, you think?" said the Professor, with a touch of bitterness.

"Would it not be better if he were cured of his malady?" asked Beatrix.

"I am sure he would be glad if you would undertake his case," said the Professor.

"Oh, that is beyond poor me. I only know simple



plantation remedies—as blisters and teas. They would not ‘minister to a mind diseased.’ ”

“Your words would act as heroic remedies upon Donnelly, if he heard them,” said the Professor.

“He will not hear them, I am sure,” retorted Beatrix, “for neither of you gentlemen is a tale-bearer; but if your duty to your friend compels you to tell him, won’t you please say also that I am not a forward minx, but only a simple country girl with good intentions?”

“Montresor,” said the Professor, smiling and restored to his habitual poise, “we shall have to divide the responsibility for those statements. I will bear witness that Miss Preston is not a ‘forward minx’ and has good intentions, and you must undertake the report that she is ‘a simple country girl’—that would lie more within your capabilities than mine. But I see I must join Miss Thompson, whom I am to take in to dinner.”

The Professor’s manner in parting was so unquestionably friendly that, as Montresor led Beatrix to the dining-room, he judged it safe to tell her of her mistake. Her face assumed an expression of consternation with which any stage manager would have been satisfied, and she exclaimed:

“Why didn’t you tell me better, Mr. Montresor? What *will* he think of me?”

“My one prayer is,” said Montresor gallantly, “that he will not think of you at all.”

At this Beatrix’s face and neck were suffused with a flush, which had not, as might have been expected, made its appearance when the Professor’s identity was disclosed.

Mrs. Rae sat on one side of the Senator and

Beatrix on the other, and in the general conversation, which prevailed frequently at that end of the table, Montresor had good opportunity of observing their manner toward each other. The same process of mutual measuring seemed to be going on as when they first met; but neither tried to score against the other. Indeed, the older woman would frequently, when the conversation became so up-to-date as to debar the young girl, make a diversion, with much tact, and bring her into it again—generally with some éclat.

After dinner, when the men had finished smoking, Montresor led Donelly toward Beatrix, saying as he did so, "I say, old man, if you are expecting to have any fun out of this young woman, I bet you two to one you don't."

"I shall be only too glad," responded the other, laughing, "if I escape another roasting."

When they had approached, Montresor said, smilingly:

"Miss Preston, let me introduce Professor Donelly."

With her grave, sweet smile and arched eyebrows, correcting his forgetfulness, she replied, holding out her hand to the Professor:

"Oh, you forget Professor Donelly was introduced to me before dinner; but he rushed off so quickly to join Mrs. Ronderson that he has probably forgotten how I look. Had you remained, Professor, you'd have learned a great deal about yourself."

"I don't suppose it could have been classed as polite learning," replied the Professor. "Listeners, you know, never hear any good of themselves."

"They sometimes hear what is good *for* themselves, which is better than polite learning—wasn't it Solon, or was it Mr. Shelby, who said '*gnothi seauton*'?"

"It sounds more like Shelby," responded the Professor, with a somewhat forced laugh, as the suspicion came to him that his unlucky, hackneyed quotation had revealed his identity; and that, after it, Beatrix had simply been baiting him as a punishment for the comedy he had inaugurated. He continued: "Shelby, I suppose, if he had listened, would have heard some good of himself."

"Without doubt he would, Professor; for, being a sportsman, he has learned perseverance, and is not hasty, like a philosopher. Every listener will hear some good of himself if he waits long enough."

"*J'y suis. J'y reste,*" came with determination from the Professor.

"Good-by, Donelly," said Montresor; "I'll come to see you here frequently this week, if Mrs. Ronderson will allow me."

Later in the evening he overheard the Senator say to Mrs. Rae:

"Look how Donelly is doting on Miss Preston—and Gluckauf, too, for that matter."

"Oh, the invincibility of Youth!" said Katherine, in a voice that had something more than mere critical assent.

"That is a very bragging remark of yours. Your experience has justified it, but why do you insult your victim?" said the Senator.

"I thought you were too good a friend, Senator," was the response, with rather a sad little shake of the head, "to think I was fishing. I was only think-

ing that, pretty and clever as she is, youth made her perfectly irresistible."

When the move was made for leaving, Miss Thompson asked Beatrix how long she expected to remain, to which she replied:

"I am extremely sorry, but I can only stay a week."

Miss Thompson smiled at this "only" on the part of the guest, and said her mother hoped she would dine with them. Beatrix, however, was engaged for every evening, except Sunday, and showed she thought it impossible to go out on that evening, much to Miss Thompson's amusement. There were dinners with Mrs. Rae, Mrs. Morton, the Professor, Montresor and Gluckauf (at Wormley's and Welcker's), and at the White House, where her uncle was very intimate. Among other engagements, a naval officer, a friend of her uncle, had asked, in her honor, the whole Sudley party to go out to Cabin John Bridge for luncheon. It is only of this last that it is necessary to say anything.

## CHAPTER XX

### CABIN JOHN BRIDGE

THEY assembled at the Senator's, and Mr. Shelby drove them out on his coach, upon which Mrs. Rae, who had been added to the party, had the box seat, and immediately behind them sat Montresor, Beatrix, Mrs. Morton and Gluckauf in the order named. It was a brilliant morning, with a dry, cold, westerly wind, having just enough nip to bring out the color on their cheeks—also on some of the noses—and making them appreciate the warmth of the rugs. Passing through Georgetown, its narrow streets and cobblestones seeming well in keeping with a coach, they were soon driving over a fair road at a decently smart pace, along bluffs overlooking the broad Potomac, which was alternately calm and silent, or rushing in sparkling, foaming whiteness over stony rapids. The horses scampered along without a touch of the whip, and the spirits of every one mounted sympathetically.

At the end of half an hour, while the others continued to amuse themselves with those bright nothings, which, like chips of lead, shine only for the instant of their production—Montresor and Beatrix being the gayest of all—Mrs. Rae fell into a grave discussion with Mr. Shelby upon the difficulty of catching up a “double thong.”

"I could teach you in ten minutes," said Shelby; "you must remember not to go thrashing the stock of your whip down at the thong—you must make the thong come up to you."

"Isn't that just like a man!" she exclaimed. "Everything must come to him—he is not willing to advance an inch to meet the poor, weak, wobbly thong."

Mr. Shelby, whose preternatural dignity of countenance rarely broke into a smile, except at the best—or the worst—after-dinner jokes, paid no sort of attention to this piece of feminine banter, but continued to explain, with soberly polite assiduity, illustrating, as he did so, with beautifully graceful examples. Montresor, who heard the remark around the corner of his ear, noted again the acid tendency in Katherine—so unlike her former self. As a whole, however, the party continued in its merry mood; and the horses, stimulated by the crisp, fresh air, soon brought them to their destination, where they descended with a frolic alacrity which made an unusually liberal display of ankles. Of this Mr. Shelby was such a solemnly frank observer that, when he complained of a piece of dust having got into one of his eyes, Montresor compared him to Acteon, the point of which, coming to him an hour later, brought forth a succession of deep-chested chuckles.

Having made a late start, when they arrived it was nearly luncheon time; and, as one of them remarked, in the party of twelve there were only two dozen good appetites. By way of a preliminary inspection of the menu, those who had never seen shad "planked" went into the kitchen to watch the pro-

cess. This was nothing more than fastening the fish to a broad piece of plank and roasting it before an open fire, basting it methodically with the melted butter and juices, which ran down into a trough at the bottom. Beatrix explained that some planks were better than others, and that her uncle had one famous in all the county. This watched shad was not spoiled, and with other simple specialties, ending with innumerable waffles, sprinkled with sugar, and excellent champagne from start to finish, their good appetites soon became only wistful memories.

After luncheon the whole party went in a body to the bottom of the ravine, to look at the bridge which spanned it, and which was one of the seven sights of Washington. It consisted of one single, stupendous, but graceful arch—the greatest in the world. There were carved upon it the names of various officials of the Government at the time it was built; but that of Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War, had been erased. When they teased Beatrix, who was, of course, a rampant Southerner, about this, she said:

“Because it was rubbed out, every one will be bound to know who it was, and then his will be the only name they will remember.”

Which they all laughingly admitted was true.

It was indeed a superb sight; so grand and easy in its silent strength—seeming so forgetful of its mighty deed, that one could not realize the truth of the adage which says, “The arch never sleeps.” In reality, it seemed a slumbering giant, the purple, leafless trees and the gloom of the valley adding to the sense of its gaunt, carelessly dormant force.

When they had all climbed back to the low build-



Cabin John Bridge



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ing, which was then the only shelter, their host insisted that those who had never been on the bridge and looked down must do so, as only in that way could they get a good idea of the height. As this detail moved off, Robinson led with Miss Thompson, then Beatrix and Captain Mackintosh would have left Montresor to escort Mrs. Rae; but as soon as the latter saw this she hurriedly joined Beatrix.

The path being too narrow for three to walk abreast, the Captain almost immediately stepped back with Montresor. The distances between all of them had not been great, so that Katherine's movement was not as rude as it sounds; still, it was sufficiently marked to be noticeable, and of this she became conscious as soon as it was done. She colored and showed other signs of embarrassment. Montresor himself felt it keenly, not from wounded vanity, but because he had, in the last few days, a feeling that, although the barrier between them still existed, yet Katherine resented it. But this action seemed to dissipate that dream, for she had never since their estrangement done anything so openly hostile.

The party was near the center of the bridge, when Robinson got upon the parapet, and, standing on the very edge, looked down into the dizzy depth, where, if he were to lose his head or slip, he would become a shapeless and unrecognizable mass on the rocks below.

"Captain Mackintosh," said he, "as you are a sailor, I advise you to stand up here and look down. Until you do, you don't know what a big thing this is. I wouldn't recommend you, Mr. Montresor, to try it if you are the least bit apt to get dizzy."

The naval officer at once got up, and so did Montresor. The latter was perfectly sure of his head, both from Alpine climbing and going aloft on ship-board; but he knew that, in one respect, the others had the advantage of him, for each of them wore rubber-soled boots, while his own were hob-nailed, which gave him a sure enough footing on earth, but were slippery on stone. He should have explained this fact and declined the experiment. However, no attempt has been made to represent him as a moral desperado; and he weakly succumbed before the bluff of Robinson, feeling that he would rather be dashed to bits than be thought a man of sense by Katherine—or Beatrix.

Of course the women exclaimed against the proceeding, Beatrix's protest, however, being of that delighted perfunctory nature which comes from the feminine portion of the children at a circus when the man ascends to the top for the grand leap.

Montresor had just steadied himself, when Robinson called both the others to come where he was and see a very curiously formed piece of lichen. This involved walking along the parapet, and was a much more perilous performance for Montresor than standing still. He had not time to start, when he heard Katherine say, in a hurried, but matter-of-fact voice:

"Mr. Montresor, won't you give me your hand to steady me while I look over on this side?"

Turning his head, he saw her in the act of mounting the parapet on the opposite side of the bridge. Remembering she was peculiarly liable to dizziness, even in looking down from ordinary heights, he was filled with horrible dismay. In his haste his

foot slipped, and he nearly fell as he jumped down on to the road. Begging her to wait for him, he was only a few seconds in crossing the intervening space. By the time he had done so, however, she had succeeded in mounting, and stood dangerously near, although not quite upon the very edge. Clad in a closely fitting gray walking-dress, as her figure was silhouetted against the hillside he could not help noting in the midst of his terror what a beautiful picture she made. Her face, which at first had quite a flush, was now of a marble pallor, made more striking by contrast with the black English toque she wore. The hand she gave him was icy cold and trembled perceptibly. For a few brief moments Montresor realized how little he really cared about any of Katherine's supposed misdemeanors, when her life was in question; and for a still shorter space of time, as he looked in her eyes he beheld—or thought he did—something he had never seen there before. Despite his urging, she insisted upon going nearer the edge and looking down. As she did so the trembling increased, her hand clung to his, and he could feel a slight swaying motion. There was no time for hesitation, and careless of what she would say or think, he caught her by the arm and practically forced her to jump down upon the roadway. When she had done it, she retained his hand—or allowed him to retain hers (he could not determine which)—while she steadied herself.

"I must admit," she said, "that I do feel a little giddy. How provoking it is! Why are women so feeble?"

"To give our sex excuse for existence," Montresor answered.

"Man does not require an excuse—he was made first; then woman came as an after-thought—a sort of postscript to creation," said Katherine.

"That is giving the Creator a feminine attribute—to put the best thing in the postscript."

He was glad to resume the old-time badinage, although he could see Katherine was only sparring for wind; then came the check which he felt was impending. She said, hurriedly:

"I wish to apologize, Mr. Montresor, for what I am afraid seemed rude a little while ago; but I wanted to speak to Miss Preston a moment, and didn't realize that it would leave no one with you."

So, after all, she was only making a polite reparation for an exhibition of bad form in which he happened to be the victim, and had not called him because, of the three men, he was the one in whom she naturally trusted. He replied, reverting to a conventional tone:

"I am sorry you gave it a thought. Rambling in the country isn't like going down to dinner. Besides, I enjoyed having a chat with Captain Mackintosh."

Her voice had a touch of frostiness as she retorted:

"I didn't mean that you had suffered any loss by it; only I didn't want to be thought intentionally rude."

None of the others knew of Katherine's tendency to giddiness, and even Montresor did not suspect that she had deliberately taken this risk in order to save him from the hazard of walking along the parapet. It was, therefore, regarded simply as an

attempt to atone for rudeness by every one except Katherine herself. She felt flushes of scorching shame when she thought of the apparently open demonstration of interest she had made in a man with whom she was upon terms of formal politeness—one, too, she thought, who should have been shielded from danger by Beatrix Preston, as she was probably already engaged to him. Thus stimulated, she took pains to show herself so indifferent that Montresor became doubly convinced that the explanation she had given of her action was the true one; and the others were confirmed in a similar view of it. Only, Beatrix's emotional heart felt all the more indignation at such ill treatment, and she resolved that if knowledge of her own liking for him would be any consolation, Montresor should have it. In pursuance of this end, she determined he should sit by her when returning, as he had done coming out.

It had been arranged that, as the party was in her honor, she should occupy the box seat going back, and in aid of her scheme it happened fortunately—I don't like to use that word, but am not really depraved—fortunately, then, Mr. Shelby had found the champagne excellent. While Mrs. Morton and Miss Marblehead were prinking, he, with some slight assistance from Gluckauf, had proceeded to "kill" the only remaining bottle, in order "to prevent its rolling about and being broken on the return journey." Although, like any Kentucky gentleman, he "carried his liquor well," to the critical observer there was, in the tendency of his cheeks to mount up and close his eyes, as well as in the excessive elaboration of his always polite manner,

abundant evidence that it required his full resources to carry this additional access worthily.

Managing to have Captain Mackintosh apart, Beatrix said:

"Don't you think, Captain Mackintosh, I had better let one of you gentlemen have my place on the box? Then, if Mr. Shelby became tired of driving, one of you could do so——"

"He does look a little *tired*," said the Captain, with a wink, utterly ignored by Beatrix, "and I should feel safer if Montresor drove, for he is the only other one of us who can do it. Shelby, you know, is so polite he will be delighted to turn over the reins, if he doesn't think we suspect him of being too—tired. But I think I can manage it by Mrs. Morton asking him to come and sit with her."

The result was that, despite Beatrix's surprise and polite protest, she again sat beside Montresor. He being a capital whip and she devoted to horses, they made a congenial couple; and, in the dusk which gathered before they reached home, their conversation assumed a cosy sympathy of tone which did much to lessen the pain Katherine had inflicted.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A BALL AT THE BRITISH LEGATION

MONTRESOR was egotistical, without being conceited. Imagine the Creator of that universe, which a Frenchman says "every man carries under his hat," looking upon it and saying, "It is not well"; or having doubts about Himself being the center, and making constant efforts to place it elsewhere. Would not that be organized chaos?

Had Montresor been of homogenic, philosophical material, he would have regarded Katherine, Beatrix, Robinson, the Professor, his father, the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the Queen as so many range flags, whose only office was to mark the relation of certain phantasmagoria of existence toward his own person; whereas he was constantly harassed by the hallucination that, perhaps, he was himself one of those range flags, and no more important than many of the others.

This conflicting condition made him, at one time, believe Robinson had attempted to take his life, and, at another, conclude it was all his own imagining—and while he constantly thought what Katherine said or did had reference to himself, he always had a relapse into misgivings which prevented that encouragement a more foolhardily vain man would have derived from those phases of her speech and behavior lately indicated.



In such a state of mind he had obtrusive thoughts of the winsomely frank kindness of Beatrix; but thrust them hastily aside, partly because he had serious doubts as to the extent of her liking for him, but mostly because the chivalrous tenderness he felt toward her rebelled at making her a scapegoat of his resentment against Katherine.

Mi Carême was celebrated by a fancy ball at the British Legation, the men alone wearing masks—which were all to be removed at a given signal.

Entering late, Montresor, as he came to the door of the drawing-room, saw again his Bacchante of the Window, for Beatrix had, by Mrs. Rae's advice, worn her lavender gown. The ruffle which now adorned it was, however, a dreamy affair of chiffon laboriously wrought by a smart dressmaker. Katherine, yielding to Beatrix's pleading, wore a similar one, and appeared stunningly beautiful—easily the most beautiful woman in the room. As Montresor gazed upon her a sense of this took possession of him, to the exclusion of the other critical faculties so morbidly developed in him. He went toward her, determined that no one nor anything should stand between them, feeling as little concern for character or antecedents as the Roman warrior, when seizing the most comely Sabine woman, for the ancestress of Lucretia.

A waltz was being played, and, in a voice which from his mask sounded husky and strange, he asked her to dance. What he would have done had she refused him outright it is difficult to say; but, with embarrassed hesitation and a startled look, she muttered something about "in a moment," allowing him

to construe it into an infinitesimal fraction of time and draw her forward as if by a hypnotic spell.

The waltz was Waldteuffel's "La Violette," and had, to a peculiar degree, that vein of sadness, running through all his compositions, which blends so well with the sensuous cadence of their rhythm. Being an Englishman, Montresor did not reverse, and this soon gave Katherine a slight giddiness, which, combined with the dreaminess of the melody, made her yield herself, with a new softness and dependence, to this strange and unexpected enchantment into which she was being borne.

Then, in the very acme of the sweet, pleading strains, Montresor had the instinct to leave the ball-room and seek seats in some place not too conspicuous—although it might be said that any place with Katherine would be a conspicuous one.

"I shall never forget this waltz," said he.

"Do you expect to forget others?" asked Katherine.

"That depends upon your powers of endurance."

"My friends are very good to me, and I hope to be taken out a great deal in the cotillon," she suggested.

"With whom are you dancing it?" he asked, eagerly.

"With Mr. Murray," she admitted, with a shade of regret.

"I was hoping it was with me," he pleaded, with regret above suspicion.

"This is one of the dances you forgot," she said, laughing.

"For the last few weeks," he replied, bitterly, "I

have forgotten everything, except to be a fool, which required no great effort."

"That sounds interesting?" she commented, inquiringly.

"Can I find you at home to-morrow?" he asked, without any trace of assurance.

"I am always at home to my friends after five o'clock," she said, with a finely detached air of imparting information.

"Friends?" he asked, disappointedly.

"Or a *friend*, if the friend is *very* punctual."

"May I be *very* punctual—how very punctual may I be—a half hour?"

"Ten minutes would be better, wouldn't it?"

"We'll compromise with twenty-nine minutes."

"But how shall I know it is you?"

"I might wear these togs," he said, indicating his modern Greek costume.

"That might excite comment."

"It would make conversation."

"Shall we need it?" she asked. "We might discuss G street as a promenade."

"That would be too fanciful," he replied, knowingly.

"Not with me; I have a personal knowledge of it, having walked there with an acquaintance," she said, looking straight at Montresor, with serious firmness.

"Then I am sure you have been sufficiently bored, and we can find a more congenial topic than that, or any fantastic disguise I may have worn to-night, or at any time recently."

They chatted merrily, guessed who was who, and when the signal came to remove masks Montresor had none to remove. People noticed them together

and said, carelessly, "Mrs. Rae and Montresor seem to have made it up," and, if they thought further, it was simply relief that one less problem existed in arranging seats for dinner.

Beatrix passed, on the arm of the Professor in Puritan costume, and gave them a gay smile, extending her hand in a way which might have been merely a friendly signal, but looked suspiciously as if she was saying, "I bless you, my children!"

Later the four were together, when Mr. Shelby, dressed as an astrologer, joined them. The Professor had lent him, for a magic crystal, one of those prisms cut with such reference to the refracting index of glass that they act as a perfect mirror of objects at the side of the observer, but can give no direct image.

The Kentuckian told Beatrix to look into it and she would see some one who would, in the future, cause her both great pleasure and great pain. Montresor thought he saw, in the corners of her mouth, that nervous tremor which he had noticed upon one or two occasions before; but she answered gaily:

"That certainly is the safest prophecy I ever heard of, for I see *myself*."

Both Montresor and the Professor knew that this could not be so, but as Katherine and Mr. Shelby were not scientific enough to have any reason for doubting, they simply laughed at the Pythic utterance. Both of the men who did know looked rather more serious than the occasion warranted.

The two women had become great friends, rather in spite of themselves at first, then with a frank appreciation that they were sympathetic in their natures to an extent which neither had ever found in

any one else. The most pronounced characteristic of each was an outward gaiety and buoyancy, resulting from animal spirits, and a keen sense of humor; while the inner pervading spirit was a thoughtful seriousness that must of necessity have a tone of sadness at times, as it faced those problems which come into even the most uneventful lives. This latter quality was kept under better control by Beatrix, who had the stronger will, which fact helped to neutralize the difference in their ages and the much greater difference in their worldly experience. In each there was a persistent strain of tender sentiment, which, in one, who was a leader of the smart set, had perforce been repressed, but responded with secret delight to its more open acknowledgment by the young girl whose grandmother, the sentimental belle of a sentimental age, had no thought of teaching her that such feelings need be either stifled or concealed. But Beatrix's mind was too acute, and her reverence for real emotion too deep, not to see that sentimentality was only a caricature of sentiment, so there was no danger of her confidences jarring upon Katherine by any such exaggeration.

Senator Ronderson had told Katherine of the manner in which the other women had tried to snub Beatrix at Sudley, and, resenting it strongly, she made up her mind to do all in her power toward protecting the young girl and making her a success in Washington. The fact that Montresor's attentions had been duly reported not only aroused her interest in Beatrix, but also a determination to do nothing which could in any way seem, even to herself, as conniving at the depreciation of a rival. The pro-

tective attitude she thus assumed easily prepared the way for the warmer feeling which sprang suddenly from their essential congeniality. As for the girl, she had been so touched by the kindness of this woman, who was sought on every side, and who almost each day gave up some pleasure in order to help her, that she was quite ready to give adoring love. She was quick-witted, and saw at once that, from the day when Katherine took her for a long drive in the country, her social prestige was more definitely fixed than it could have been by a dozen dinners at the White House.

How far Montresor affected their friendship at this particular time I have no means of knowing. Whether he was an unsettling factor, or, in some subtle way, one which stimulated that sympathetic understanding which drew them together, would require a profound philosopher, to whom the very innermost hearts of both women were laid bare—and no such person existed.

Promptly at half-past four the day after the ball Montresor rang the bell at Singleton's residence, and was admitted to Mrs. Rae's presence. Everything seemed perfectly natural, and they resumed their intimate manner toward each other without taking up the theme which had been the trivial cause of their estrangement. Katherine made several attempts to do so, but Montresor waived aside, with jocular misunderstanding, everything she said, and would have none of it. It had separated them for dreary weeks; and he would not again risk the unlucky subject. Besides, he wished to show her—and himself—his confidence in her, and also desired to avoid any explanations of her conduct, since that might lead him,

in a moment of impulse, to say something he felt, at any rate, ought to be deferred.

If we trifle with the verities of life, they will shrink from us disheartened, and our flippant invitation for their return will be met by misgiving apathy. Thus both Montresor and Katherine found, although they might tacitly agree to ignore their misunderstandings and distrust, that the mere attitude of alienation had induced a subtle change in their relations not so easily obliterated. While their intercourse was outwardly the same as before, inwardly there was a distant sense of some vital element in their sympathy being deadened. Each of them meant to restore to the other a generous, unquestioning confidence, without recrimination, and to acknowledge, even to themselves, their own transgressions. But the most fair-minded are a trifle more acutely conscious of another's faults than of their own. Katherine was more ready than Montresor to assume the blame, since, in such matters, a woman likes to be forgiven much by a man, for she knows the extent of her forgiveness is an accurate measure of her attraction. Still, the apparent ease with which she had compelled Montresor's abasement tended, insensibly to herself, to make her now regard the almost boyish frankness, with which he had shown his admiration, as a commonplace susceptibility, instead of the charming naturalness to which she had before attributed it. And he who, while chafing at their estrangement, had often fancied that if they ever became reconciled he would decide matters at once by asking her to be his wife, now hesitated, and, with admirable scrupulousness, said that he should not offer himself to any pure woman

so soon after his affair with Mrs. Morton—at any rate, he must give his immediate attention to other matters than love-making. That his affairs should in any degree displace Katherine seemed a poetic injustice, as it was largely in obedience to the stimulus of her companionship that he had turned to them with earnestness. In his previous life that tendency to view everything with dispassionate criticism, which I have called philosophic, had preserved his character in an unstable equilibrium at once inimical to growth or to hardening strength; but Katherine's personality had moved upon the face of this psychic stagnation, and his soul, at first borne turbulently forward, was beginning to seek more broadly human objects for its energy than the gratification of a purely personal craving.

That to be shaken out of his former easy indifference was of benefit in the general development of his character, has been indicated even by these incoherent notes. If I have dwelt unduly upon the social side of his life in Washington, it is because that was the most visible. I never knew until long afterward the amount of hard work he managed to accomplish in both of the tasks to which he had committed himself. He wrote long and minute letters with admirably acute suggestions to McManus, and, finally, as we shall see, himself unearthed a decisive document in his mother-in-law's lawsuit. As to the political mission with which he had been entrusted, he was complimented more and more highly, as time went on, by his cousin. The latter had written of one of Montresor's letters which had been shown to the Premier: "It is clear-cut and convincing, without that smile between the lines, which used to be in



everything you wrote, stealing away its force." In it Montresor had stated that the Irish question specifically influenced only a small group of "practical politicians," who were powerless to affect great measures. He described on one side men like Elton, plausible, adroit in the use of influence, patronage, and parliamentary tricks, unscrupulous without being dishonest, and effective in all ordinary legislation because cohesive and disciplined; on the other, men like Ronderson and Singleton, of varying culture and origin, but of mental and moral force, who, while finding it necessary to use, and even humor the other class in small matters, dominated and almost invariably had their own way in important ones.

He called to mind how strongly Ronderson had opposed a bill for the benefit of a British company, in which a job was suspected, while Elton had favored it; and the latter had won. Now, on the Extradition Treaty their positions were reversed, and he felt confident that Ronderson would win this time, etc., etc.

The fact that Robinson, a man he so disliked, was ranged on the opposite side in social affairs, in those of business and politics, was a coincidence which concentrated all his efforts, and made them, perhaps, more effective. But it would be better to state more clearly how these interests were now merging and coming to a crisis.

## CHAPTER XXII

### SENATOR RONDERSON AS CHAMPION

ALTHOUGH there was, undoubtedly, some business or other interest existing between Katherine and Robinson, it was not the syndicate project—at least, in its objectionable form. Her concern in that undertaking was simply this: The syndicate plan proposed running an avenue through the heart of Mrs. Weeks' home, which enhancement of her property's value the good woman resisted, most unreasonably, from motives of a sadly sentimental character. Hoping to protect herself from both the syndicate and a worthless sailor husband, who would delight in the opportunity of "settling down upon her," she asked Mrs. Rae to foreclose the mortgage and "keep the place in trustfulness until things kinder blowed over," this phrase apparently being a euphemism for the passing away of her husband. At first Katherine had thought she might influence Thompson and, with the duplicity of most women in a good cause, had become more cordial toward him and his family than her wont; but that podgy-looking man was made of iron when it came to giving up the least tittle of prospective gain, and it soon became apparent that her only hope lay in the defeat of the bill. She could do nothing toward this personally, as her brother had expressed himself in its

favor, and she knew he was sensitively scrupulous about allowing private interests or sentiment to influence him in public affairs.

This much Montresor learned soon after the resumption of intimacy with Katherine, and it gave him a good reason for wishing the Syndicate Bill's failure, over and above his general dislike of any scheme for the benefit of Thompson or Robinson.

Moreover, about this same time he learned from Atkinson that Robinson was, as he had suspected, privately employed in the suit against Lady Broadlands, nominally as an "advisory counsel," but probably to get most of the property himself, if successful; for the man who had instituted the suit was a mere dummy. The claimant (or Robinson) was in need, however, of a considerable sum of money, as not only was a large amount due the original owner of the claim, but, to quote Atkinson, "it also takes a lot of money to collect evidence for a claim like his. To collect evidence from one single man sometimes takes a small fortune; especially if he doesn't care for the simple life they lead in the penitentiary."

Montresor had employed Atkinson because he was struck with a sort of dry loyalty with pervaded the man, and MacManus, absent in San Francisco looking for the "certified copy," heartily approved. The celerity with which he investigated the matter seemed astonishing, until he frankly admitted that, years before, the claim had been offered to his father, who had not cared to undertake it.

"Fortunately for us," Atkinson went on to say, "Robinson is very hard pressed for money, I hear—oh, I know I told you everything he touches turns to gold, but he spends it like water; and then, people

like that are apt to have the converse faculty, and when they touch other people's gold it turns to paper and makes trouble, which reminds me to show you something I received yesterday."

He handed Montresor an obscure Chicago newspaper, in which was marked an item as follows:

"We hear that a young lawyer, who is well known in this city, New York and Washington as a Congressional counselor, is getting into trouble. It seems that the money with which he was entrusted by a Catholic Church association, and also some belonging to a Fenian society, was invested by him too wisely and not well. The church association may confine its action to moral reproaches, but the other is apt to be more harsh."

"You can take that," said Atkinson, "for what it's worth. If it insinuated such a thing about myself I wouldn't believe it, but I'm more credulous concerning other people. Anyhow, I do know Robinson needs money; and I don't see where he's to get it, unless the Syndicate Bill goes through, for Thompson would see him eternally damned before he would give him a dollar over expenses until he has a sure thing in return."

"What are the present chances of the Syndicate Bill?" asked Montresor, interested in the new phase of the matter.

"Strange to say, the fate of that bill depends a great deal upon whether we pass our Foreign Claim Bill. You see, the papers have been pitching into Congress so much for the big appropriation bills already passed that the Chairman of the Committee on

Appropriations is frightened about the elections this fall, and hints pretty strongly that if our bill is passed he will oppose the Syndicate Bill. You know the District of Columbia has no vote, so it can wait, just as well as French and Spanish citizens."

"This seems," said Montresor, "to give me a personal concern in the success of your bill, as that would defeat the Syndicate one and prevent Robinson having money to carry on his claim against us—sort of 'please, fire, burn stick, make stick beat pig' arrangement."

"Yes," assented the other; "when Ronderson makes his speech to-morrow he may think he is pleading for widows and orphans—or something more noble still, my commission—but it will really be helping you to defeat Robinson in a patriotic endeavor to acquire English land for an American citizen."

"What is Elton's attitude?" Montresor asked.

"As patriotic," the other admitted, with acid warmth, "as you would expect in our slickest statesman. Says it's un-American to appropriate millions for foreigners and leave none to build a bridge over Rock Creek, so American citizens can go to the University and the Cathedral, which will be built—if the bridge is. And some of his crowd, who had promised to help us, cough now when the matter is spoken of, and will be ill to-morrow when the vote is taken. Others, under pretence of friendly amendment, have tried to send it back to the House and kill it in that way. There are only about half a dozen Senators who haven't made up their minds, and you must watch them to-morrow. Ronderson will exert himself, for, besides the merits of the bill,

it is now somewhat a question of prestige. If Elton can down him on this, he may do so on the Extradition Treaty."

Thus it may be seen that, when Montresor took his seat between Katherine and Beatrix the next day in the Senate gallery, he was one of the most directly and intensely interested of the great throng which had flocked to hear Ronderson speak. If the latter were successful the Syndicate scheme would fail, Katherine would not have to bargain with Thompson or Robinson about Mrs. Weeks' farm, Robinson would not have the money to prosecute the suit against Lady Broadlands, and it might be abandoned; then, too, as Atkinson had said, the fate of the Extradition Treaty and England's ability to punish dynamite criminals might depend upon Ronderson's power to break the allegiance of Elton's compact coterie in this night's debate (for, owing to lack of time, they were having evening sessions).

Ronderson was as great a favorite in society as he was with the people at large, so there were a number of smart women, whose brilliant gowns and jeweled necks gave a touch of frivolous adherence, which in some paradoxical way added to the serious expectancy with which his speech was awaited. Perhaps this was because of the well-known fact that his speeches never showed the tendency to make a joke of everything, which distinguished the Senator in private; and the ability on the part of social rattle-brains to appreciate one of his speeches, while regarded by themselves as demonstrating the real profundity of their intellects, was looked upon by the multitude as the final proof of his extraordinary capacity. He opened his speech by saying:

"This measure, Mr. President, might properly be entitled, 'An Act for the Relief of the Senate of the United States from an Imputation of Dishonesty.' "

Then, rapidly, but with perfect clearness, he showed that, by the Constitution, the Senate alone shared with the President the responsibility for making the treaty of which this bill was the fulfillment; it had been done so after careful deliberation; its consent had been full and unequivocal; "and yet," said he, "after fifty years, I am called upon to debate the question of whether or not we shall make good our pledged word. I expect to be asked many questions to-night, some of them wise, many of them foolish, and, as my own mental equipment is not equal to such a wide range, I would feel some fear if I had not other resources. But, Mr. President, these questions have all been asked and answered many times over in these long years, and I shall simply avail myself of history repeating itself."

Nevertheless, new questions were found, and, in dealing with them, the Senator gave, perhaps, the most striking evidence of his power. In no other legislative body in the world does custom allow so much and such argumentative questioning, in the midst of a set speech, as in the Senate of the United States; but Ronderson was ready with an answer in every case. Did some one confront him with a mass of bewildering figures, he canceled the conflicting ones and presented a crisp little sum in mental arithmetic which any one could verify without shutting his eyes. Where the question was involved and confused, instead of making fun of it, he straightened it out and answered it squarely. Sometimes he let the question answer itself. Being asked if he did not

know that it was a rule of the Department never to pay interest, he drew himself up and said: "The Senator asks me if I do not know that for fifty years the Department has made it a rule not to pay the interest—nor the principal—of this debt?" This part of the debate reminded Montresor of a Shakespearian battle in which one adversary after another enters with "a flourish and alarm," only to retreat ignominiously or lie prone upon the stage. His speech had none of Singleton's wide and scholarly range of words—he often used the same ones over again—nor any of the other's clever phrasing; several times a purist, not absorbed in the speech, might have detected grammatical errors; there were never any flights such as are usually called eloquent, but his words had a simple felicity which atoned for their frequency, and, while there was no phrase that could be remembered as a model, there was scarcely one which did not mark some advance in the subject. Singleton's argument had been lucid and persuasive, but Ronderson's statement of the case was of an elementary clearness which seemed to remove it from the domain of debate.

"I feel," whispered Beatrix, "as if I knew all this before, and he is only taking the words out of my mouth."

His voice, deep and rich, had the convincing earnestness, not of a chivalric advocate—rather that of an upright judge.

The effect upon Montresor was marked. He had, at first, thought chiefly of his personal interest in the bill's success, to which was presently added a sporty enjoyment of the Senator's wrestling with his wily questioners. Soon, however, all was forgot-



ten, overlooked, as his eye was directed to a broader and more exalted range. Hewas in the Parliament of Nations, a tribunal so vast that the big Atlantic was a trifling interval, and the Member from Midlothian whispered words of encouragement to the Senator from Arizona, who fought the battle of human justice. He realized that the men who resisted wrong, whether at Runnymede, Naseby, or Lexington, whether at Westminster or Washington, were all of the same blood, moved by the same principles, and the precise theatre of their actions was a mere detail. Ronderson, he knew, had opposed England strongly upon the Alaskan question, and, with the inspiration of the moment upon him, Montresor believed that, were it left to the English Parliament to decide, Englishmen of the same great stamp would plead America's case and oppose the same wire-pulling Eltons of their own country, who could only take a narrow and short-sighted view of political expediency. All the young Englishman's natural world-patriotism was aroused, and he resolved that he, too, would take an active part in that march toward universal disciplined liberty and justice which the English-speaking nations lead, both by virtue of their experience and by the sheer weight of one hundred and fifty millions of adherents.

"I wish," sighed Beatrix, as the Senator concluded, "he had not such a plain case to prove. I would like to see what he can do with something really difficult."

The question was carried by a vibrant majority, Elton and his friends not daring to test their strength by calling for a yea-and-nay vote; indeed, their anx-

ious faces and squirming consultations had long before confessed defeat.

Montresor, being given a "lift" by Senator Ronderson as they were driving back, felicitated him upon his speech.

"We have seemed slow and selfish in this matter," he replied, "but in a country as big as ours local selfishness is about the only way of getting at the general good. Congress has to be a sort of Clearing-house for the wants of States, which are as different from each other as Holland from Switzerland and Egypt from Russia. If New Yorkers busied themselves about Yuba Dam, and Californians about Hell Gate, nothing would have been done, and we should not now be rich enough to pay these poor French and Spanish people their claims. As I drove down this morning, I stopped at Center Market and provided for my family; then I went to the Committee on Post-offices and got a new post-office opened in my State, and to-night I did what I could to protect our national honor—or reputation, whichever you call it."

Montresor was too critical, and too thoroughly aroused from his own self-concentration, to accept entirely this rough political theory; but, as he thought of the deadlock which Donnelly had predicted if all the world were altruists, he realized that an active and intelligent egoism is necessary to the development of efficient altruism.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE LAST CONTEST WITH ROBINSON

As Montresor drove away from the Capitol that night, he saw Atkinson—clad in a thin overcoat, which shrank feebly in the icy March wind—munching a sandwich and patiently waiting for a street car, oblivious of enticing cabmen. The thought of this persistent economy oppressed him; so that it was less to discuss his own affairs than to satisfy himself of the other's good fortune that he paid him a visit the next day. Atkinson was nonchalant, almost apathetic, but finally confessed that he would receive quite a neat little pot; and, in answer to Montresor's suggestion that he give himself a good rest, replied:

"There is only one thing I have fully determined to do, when I get the money in bank, and that is to have the breasts of two canvas-backs and a bottle of Haut Brion of '74 every day for a month; after that I may take me a wife."

"The breasts of two canvas-backs and only one wife!" said Montresor. "That is as bad as Falstaff's proportion of sack to bread."

"Claim agents learn to practice moderation sooner or later," Atkinson suggested, drily. "Even Robinson will have to do so now. He won't get anything out of the Syndicate affair; in fact, he's thrown up the sponge by an out-and-out quarrel with Ron-derson."

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Encouraged by Montresor's "Indeed?" he went on: "It seems that a little while ago Robinson wrote to Senator Ronderson, in his—assured way, about a friend he wanted a consulship for, and got only a formal acknowledgment of the receipt of his letter. So our friend Robinson, being, for some reason, in an irritated state of mind, goes this morning to see the Senator about it—a great mistake, a great mistake, for if ever a man needs a cool head and a cool tongue it's when he attempts to lobby Ronderson. Well, he had hardly passed the time of day, when, in a short 'now, then,' sort of voice, he asked: 'Have you done anything about my letter?' 'Oh, yes,' says the Senator, calm as you please, 'I put it where I thought it would do the most good.' 'Secretary or President?' jerks out Robinson. 'Waste basket,' answers Ronderson, just as matter-of-fact as if he had said 'Vice-President.' With that, Robinson completely lost his head, and ended by threatening to make trouble about the Extradition Treaty." Atkinson paused significantly, and Montresor, taking his cue, asked:

"How did the Senator like that?"

"The report is," responded the other, rolling the words in his mouth with slow epicureanism, "that when the Senator heard this, you could have knocked him over with a sledge-hammer, if you had one, and were big enough to handle it; but, as Robinson wasn't fully equipped, he terminated the interview, and, in opening the door, nearly upset the Senator's secretary."

To Montresor's own surprise, his predominant feeling was not one of exultation at Robinson's discomfiture, and the prospective miscarriage of the

Syndicate plan; nor was it anxiety about the success of the Extradition Treaty, except to the extent that it was a measure urged by Ronderson for the benefit of humanity in the Parliament of Nations, of which the American Congress was only an influential committee.

This broadening of his sympathies and aspirations, so far from injuring his conduct of private matters, was beneficial, as he acquired a calmer and, therefore, more accurate view of them. Mind, I do not pretend to have, in these notes, laid bare his innermost soul. One cannot dissect a man's character until he is dead, any more than his body—or, as the Senator put it, "Never speak ill of a man, unless he is dead." But I have already alluded to the change in Montresor's character during his visit to America, and this now became obvious even to ordinary acquaintances. During his whole life he had been a dabbler, whether in love, politics, agnosticism, or other things. Only in sport had he been thorough, and there simply because it was necessary—since he could not say of a parted stay or a fallen horse, "It doesn't matter."

But he commenced by taking his love, or fancy, for Katherine seriously; then got Robinson on his mind, and he suddenly became morbidly fervent in everything, which germinal warmth caused the good in him to grow faster and more robustly than the selfish and evil, resulting, eventually, in the same tranquil philosophy as had characterized him in the beginning—only, instead of springing from contempt of the world's littleness, it now came from confidence in its greatness, if rightly sought.

This new frame of mind became immediately of practical benefit to him, for about this time he made

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a review of all the data which MacManus had collected regarding the lawsuit against Lady Broadlands; and, no longer having his mind fevered with a desire to find Robinson engaged in some criminal dealing with the missing certified copy, he discovered a commonplace clue which speedily led to a successful search. He found the copy himself in a dust-covered trunk of papers, long forgotten, amid the rubbish of a garret in an old house in Alexandria to which he was conducted.

The "certified copy" showed that the original paper had been dated "1801," and would completely demolish the case of the claimants, who contended that it should be much later—probably 1807. This whole matter now rapidly culminated. Blessed with a saner view of things, Montresor allowed Mrs. Rae to explain that her recent conferences with Robinson had been for the purpose of trying to recover from him a debt due to her husband's estate, of which she was executrix. His latest proposition had been to settle this by assigning to the estate the claim against the land of Lady Broadlands. As the latter's name did not appear in the title of the case—a trustee's being used instead—Mrs. Rae was ignorant that Montresor's mother was an interested party until he told her. She was now in a dilemma, for, having assigned her whole interest in her husband's estate to two of his orphan nieces, she did not feel that she could forego any opportunity of increasing its value; and her lawyer, who had advised her acceptance of this proposition, would shortly arrive in Washington to close the matter. Montresor urged her not to decide, except upon a purely business basis, but suggested that Robinson might consent to let him

appear at the meeting, and present some new evidence, of which, perhaps, neither he nor Mrs. Rae's lawyer was aware. Robinson assented with seeming alacrity, saying he had only recently come into the case, but had full confidence in the brief made by his predecessor.

When Montresor arrived on the day appointed, he found Mrs. Rae alone with her lawyer, a prematurely old and risen young man—so much more hard-hearted than the naturally old, who are really rather compassionate creatures. He had written a thesis upon "Damages," and was firmly convinced that earth had no sorrow which money could not heal. He was explaining to Katherine that she occupied a "fiduciary position," as evidenced by the fact that she had been obliged to give bonds. When she paraphrased this by, "I am to know it is a position of trust by the fact that I am not trusted?" he gave her a pained and hopeless look; but was relieved when both Mrs. Rae and Montresor agreed that a business view should be taken of the matter.

When Robinson was announced, Montresor was shocked by the change in his appearance. His ruddy face had now a muddy pallor, save a red, blistery spot on each cheek, while dark, flabby circles made his gray eyes seem weak and ill. Another mysterious paragraph had appeared in the Chicago paper, intimating the threatening attitude of a Fenian organization toward an untrustworthy custodian of its funds, and it was now easy to connect this with Robinson. So completely had Montresor's abnormally acrid dislike been modified that it was with a feeling of half-shame, as if taking bread from a starving man, he contemplated producing the certified copy

which would demolish the claimant's case. The orphans who would be wronged, if a worthless title could be passed off on them, were mere abstractions; whereas this man, so much beneath him in station and fortune, whom, moreover, he had already beaten at every turn, stood before him in palpable distress. Wishing to rid himself of his disagreeable duty, he went straight to the point, saying:

"As you are aware, Mr. Robinson, this case hinges upon whether a certain will made by one of Black's heirs was recorded in 1801 or, say, in 1807. If it was made or recorded in 1807, your client might build up a case, but if in 1801, it would be fatal to him and make my mother's title unimpeachable. Do you not agree with me?"

"Whatever Mr. Robinson may think," interrupted the lawyer, with sententious importance, "I will say that, if it is shown the will you speak of was dated in 1801, I must advise Mrs. Rae to consider this matter no longer."

When Montresor produced the certified copy, showing the date to be, indeed, 1801, Robinson stood for a moment disconcerted, with blank indecision, but, suddenly pulling himself together, said:

"Perhaps you know, Mr. Montresor, I have only lately come into this case as advisory counsel; so, before commenting on the paper you have produced, permit me to compare it with the brief my associate has prepared. Mrs. Rae, may I spread these papers out on the desk at the end of the room?"

Having permission, he proceeded there, and, seating himself with his back toward the others, commenced, as appeared by the movement of his head from side to side, a careful comparison of the two



documents. Meantime, the lawyer questioned Montresor about the finding of the paper, and learned that he had taken it with his own hand from a trunk, where it had been in a bundle of other papers, totally irrelevant.

In a short time Robinson returned with a face of exaggerated gravity, yet betraying a lurking smirk of his habitually jaunty assurance.

"There is no doubt," he said, "that this is an important paper; but I do not quite agree with you, Mr. Montresor, as to its absolute conclusiveness. Let me call your attention to something you have probably not noticed. The date is not written out in full, but in numerals, and, if you will use this glass, you will see at the upper part of the last "1," in 1801, a slight abrasion, just such as would appear if it had originally been a "7" and the upper stroke had been scratched out, converting it into a "1." Now, I do not think so myself, but juries are suspicious, and would be apt to think some too zealous agent had altered the date from 1807 to 1801."

He had brought from the desk a large magnifying glass, and, under this, Montresor could distinctly see evidence of scraping, as did, also, the lawyer, who had officiously craned forward, moving away after a brief inspection, with knitted brow and protruding under-lip, as if saying: "This is, indeed, a bad business."

Whether due to the good blood of a family which during centuries had an untainted record, or to a reflex of the condition of mind to which Montresor had lately brought himself, whereby he took his personal affairs less seriously, he bore himself under this galling insinuation with a calm neither resentful

nor exaggerated in its disdain. With the clear brain thus left to him, the thought immediately occurred that perhaps Robinson, when at the desk, had himself scratched the place; and Montresor tried to intimate this—not too coarsely, however.

"Mr. Robinson," said he, "there is certainly some scratching at the top of the 'I,' but the scratched part is white, while the rest of the paper is a faded yellow. This looks as if it had been done very *recently*."

"Not so recently, I am sure, Mr. Montresor," deprecatingly suggested the other, "as to have been done by any one in your immediate employ."

With that sporting instinct so highly developed in Englishmen and Americans, Montresor derived genuine enjoyment from this rather neat counter to his own too delicate attack. Katherine, who, after some hesitation, realized there was a question about the document's reliability, came to the rescue in a convincing voice:

"But Mr. Montresor discovered this paper himself, and took it from the trunk with his own hands."

Her lawyer, aghast at this left-handed assistance, saw no humor in it, but, looking askance at the Englishman, interposed:

"I must beg you, Mrs. Rae, not to join in this implication upon Mr. Montresor without consulting your counsel. You might be liable for damages—ahem—that is—but in your case action would not lie——"

"You see, Mr. Robinson," laughingly interrupted Montresor, "the mutilation of this paper lies between you and me." He was in good spirits, as, in glancing at the document, his thorough knowledge of details

had supplied him with an irresistible rejoinder. "But it doesn't matter who perpetrated the joke, as the will must have been recorded in 1801, for this reason: the copy is certified by the Clerk of the Court, James L. Hyatt, and *he* did not remain in office after 1801, and so could not have certified it after that year."

Completely taken aback by this, Robinson attempted a jocular "Is that so?" in reply, his assumption of indifference being aided by an involuntary and somewhat nervous look toward the drawing-room door. Following his glance, Mrs. Rae perceived the butler, who stood under the looped portière which separated the drawing-rooms, patiently waiting, in frozen stainlessness of attire and attitude, bearing a silver tray upon which lay a note. She nodded a signal to advance, which he did with military precision, in a straight line. When he arrived at the proper distance, he said, with machine-like, even voice:

"A note for Mr. Robinson, madam."

As she gave formal indication that the person mentioned was in the room, and permission for the note's delivery, Katherine had a look of annoyance at what she regarded an unnecessary liberty. Seeing this, Robinson muttered an apology, which, however, was left unfinished when he recognized, apparently, the rough, somewhat illiterate handwriting of the missive. Was it imaginative suspicion of confidential relations between Robinson and Singleton's butler, once harbored by Montresor, or did he really see, in those eyes of respectable impassiveness, a gleam of intelligence, nay, one of commiseration, for the man whose trembling fingers faltered with the note? There was an accentuating incongruity in the fact

that such a hunted, desperate look could come upon the face of any one amid the well-ordered appointments of a quiet drawing-room in the heart of a great city. Having asked permission to read, he attempted to place the magnifying glass upon an adjacent table, but it dropped with a dull thud upon the floor without being noted by him. His distress was so unmistakable that Katherine said, impulsively:

"I hope, Mr. Robinson, you have not received any bad news?"

"Only one of my clients has got into trouble; but I must ask you to excuse me." There was a rattle in his voice as he tried to answer airily, and his smile became the same grotesque grin which may be seen upon some poor beast, without further strength or resource, tracked down by pursuers and knowing its hour has come.

As he passed out, the butler held aside the portière a trifle carelessly; otherwise, nothing suggesting emotion ruffled his smug composure. But Montresor was moved by ineffable pity. It did not matter that he had new proof of Robinson's shifty trickiness, or that the punishment now about to overtake him would probably come from associates in a criminal political organization. He could only think that here was a human creature whom fate had placed on the wrong side of life and so doomed to destruction; whose crafty stratagems or strenuous battlings simply raised more formidable adversaries and made more inevitably crushing his final defeat, with no chance of friendly succor.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### HOW COMETH LOVE?


As I come to set down my final notes, it would marvelously clarify them were I able to consult some accepted authority upon that universal force called love. Time out of mind it has been written about—in Egyptian hieroglyphs, in mediæval tomes, and, I wager, the evening paper, moist from the press, now cried upon the streets, has something to say about it. Nowhere along the line, however, will you obtain any exact knowledge of this subject, the only conceivable one upon which the British Encyclopædia has no illuminating monograph. Not even a working empyric hypothesis has been formulated upon the known facts—they are too contradictory. When the brave Perseus saved the naked Andromeda from an ugly monster, the conditions have been thought favorable to the spontaneous origin of love; yet I read the other day of a lady who, after being saved from a rushing motor-car by a gallant gentleman, struck him in the face because his grasp had been lacking in delicacy; moreover, every one has heard of the painter who could gaze unmoved at his beautiful model, when clothed in the chaste simplicity of a northern light, and yet fell in love with her as she crossed a muddy street. If called upon for a recipe, I would probably say, "Take equal parts of beauty,

youth and idleness, stir well together, and serve hot"—but there is an even chance that this would produce a detestable mess. The most learned scientist is as helpless as the most ignorant clubman. He takes a telescope, with an X-ray attachment, and observes the skeleton of a distant couple, which, from the formation of their hip-bones, he knows to be male and female. The male skeleton advances rapidly, seizes the female skeleton's hand, and places the bones of one arm in a more or less acute angle around her spinal column; they draw closer together, the female arm-bones become interlocked with those of the male, the fronts of the skulls impinge against each other and remain thus for sixteen seconds; then they disentangle and move off through an apple-blossomed grove, each with an arm around the other's spine. The scientist knows such phenomena accompany the manifestation called love. He has noted the distance between the skeletons, and the presence or absence of coloring matter in their hair and of synovial fluid in their joints; by which he can infer the amount of flesh they carry, and their age. If neither too fat nor too thin, and not too old, he decides it may be a case of love—or it may be one of mere bargain and sale, which exhibits precisely similar contorted actions. In any event, his opinion is not worth tuppence. After all, perhaps love is merely a name—an alias like "John Doe," assumed by all sorts of men to carry out divers acquisitive designs, and which is as impossible to describe succinctly as mankind itself. So, without professing to explain intelligently, I shall, as nearly as practicable, confine myself to a statement of facts.

Following Beatrix's advent and the accompanying

whirl of rumors as to her friendliness for Montresor, the latter's sudden reconciliation with Katherine and the affectionate intimacy which sprang up between the two women puzzled every one, including myself, as to the true state of affairs. This was further complicated by the fact that, after prolonging her visit at the Senator's—although with misgivings about her flower garden—Beatrix accepted an invitation from Katherine and moved to Singleton's for an extensible stay of two weeks, whereby was destroyed for us one quantitative measure of Montresor's affections, since he rode with one as often as he drove with the other, and their assignments at dinner were as hopelessly balanced. Of course, there were vulgar intimations that he had "two strings to his bow," and, at the time, I could not help sharing this opinion, my friendship for him, however, suggesting the excuse that he probably felt himself unworthy of either—"or worthy of both," he laughingly amended in later years; not that there is truly any difference, being only a question of scale. And, since it is doubtful if a man who is not cut off in his youth can have an "undying love" at all, I worried myself over the question whether he could have such a passion for two women, especially at the same time.

One disposed to weigh the matter could enumerate many things in Katherine's favor: at the climax of her beauty, clever, accomplished, influencing men who influenced the world, she had, moreover, the benefit of that unconscious dogged loyalty which every one recognized in Montresor. Beatrix had the delicate, yet lusty, prettiness of youth in the full flush of roseate promise—and promises can be so much more prodigal than any possible fulfillment.



Although not considered, at that time to be so clever as the older woman, she had a naive, piquant audacity which, when Katherine attempted it—for each unconsciously imitated the other—did not sit so well upon her. But most to her advantage was an indefinable, mute appeal to that instinct of chivalric succor which, in men, still survives from those brutal Middle Ages when much picturesque and unnecessary protection was lavished upon good-looking women. I do not know why it was—perhaps something in her quaint bringing up—but, although she seemed always able to give as good as was sent, and bore herself ever fearlessly, there were times when her eyes looked at me with a dreamy trustfulness—about what I knew not—and, in a trice, I was stripped of my ridiculous frock-coat and baggy trousers, was clad in good Spanish armor, and all my soul cried, "To the rescue!" If I, a minor official in the State Department, charged with the prosaic duty of indexing records, and having no proof of the existence of any ancestors earlier than the eighteenth century, could feel in that way, how much more natural for Montresor, who could trace his descent from Guy of Warwick, or some similar person.

The undaunted spirit with which Beatrix attempted to absorb all at once every phase of the many-sided life about her gave another interesting aspect of her character. That she should prettily mimic Katherine in poise and knowledge of the world was natural; but this was only the beginning. Senator Ronderson declared he would have no time to push the Extradition Treaty, as it was all taken up in getting himself sufficiently posted to answer



her questions on politics; while I, who had never bothered myself whether a document meant peace or war, but whether it went with the A's or the Z's, now sat up late at night in order to give her, when called upon, an accurate account of our later diplomacy. (This work eventually led to my promotion—in the Department.) Buddhism, Wagner, Mallock, Omar Khayyam—no matter what subject might be started, if she found herself ignorant of it, she attacked it the next day with avid energy, seeking its very heart. Scientific agnosticism occupied a large share of her attention—which brings me to another matter. Professor Donnelly had always been a great friend of Katherine's, but now his calls at the Singleton house overflowed all conventional demands of friendship. With him Beatrix soon rambled into intimacy of a frank innocence which might be either very safe or very dangerous. The Professor's own attitude was most correct. If he had the appearance of doting upon her, it was with a grandfatherly manner which implied that the twenty years' difference in their ages stood as an impenetrable bodyguard between them—yet, he must have heard of Abelard. Although given to *risqué* jokes himself, he resented all such conversation in her presence, and winced when she herself alluded to the sex of dogs and horses in the explicit terms of a sporting country. Nor would he present agnostic views to her except upon persistent command, and then did so in an apologetic manner not habitual to him. This made her seem ungrateful when she impatiently reproached him for what she called the "patient laziness of agnosticism." "Why don't you try to find out for yourself," she said. "Do you suppose Colum-

bus could have discovered America if he had stayed paddling about in Cadiz, waiting for America to come to him?" At another time: "You may talk, Professor Donelly, until your tongue is tired, if such a thing can ever happen; but, with all your fantastic 'Moral Equations,' you cannot make the Rule of Three into the Golden Rule." And when, one day, he was looking through the microscope at a specimen of infusoria, she said, in a tone of childlike inquiry: "Perhaps, Professor Donelly, *Sigma spiralis* is looking back at you through the glass and saying: 'That man shows an intelligence almost infusorial'?"

In truth, she took it all too much to heart. The country rector who had guarded her religious views shared the narrow prejudices of that set of Prot-estants who, ever since Boskovitch's announcement of the atomic theory—as they thought, in support of trans-substantiation—had fought blindly against science. He would, Beatrix said, be as much shocked to hear that she read Darwin as to know the distemper had broken out among the hounds. Whether Beatrix was interested in the man on account of his soul, or in his soul on account of the man, it resulted in giving the Professor much of her time; which brought a new influence to bear. Katherine, appreciating Donelly's attractiveness, viewed the possible consequences apprehensively, and, with mother-bird cunning, tried to draw him off by solicitous favor. Montresor, with the same anxiety, also used constant efforts to distract Beatrix from overmuch thought of the Professor. Donelly may have understood all this and taken his cue; at any rate, he did the right thing in every respect—except staying away.

One day, when Montresor was waiting in the

outer drawing-room while his card was taken up to Singleton, Beatrix, in the other room, unaware of his presence, commenced singing what was known as "Katherine's Air," but not with the words belonging to it. What she sang was this:

"I love thee not, yet in thy sight  
My heart its fullest pleasure knows,  
And with the music of thy voice  
My blood in liquid cadence flows.

So, in thy hand, when parting,  
Mine lingers with a strange content,  
And to the pleading of thine eyes  
My bosom throbs with vain consent."

Her voice had all that quaint, old-fashioned plain-tiveness which at Sudley had so moved the Senator; and, knowing that she sometimes wrote verses, Montresor jumped to the conclusion that her song was her own, being filled thereby with complex and distracting thoughts. He knew that poets do not feel all they write; but suppose this should be real, and should be meant for the Professor?—It would be too horrible! Or it might possibly mean some Other Person, who, whatever his feelings, would be restrained by a sense of honor from offering himself—a pretty bad situation for the Other Person as well. When he met her later in the day, he did not allude to the song; but there was a tender concern in his manner which made even the handing of a programme resemble a caress.

How long this confusing condition of affairs might have continued, I do not know; but destiny

sent from out of the darkness a flash which, in an instant, showed those most intimately concerned their true relations toward each other.

Wishing to discuss with Katherine a dinner she was to chaperone at the Country Club, on the Tennytown Road, Montresor called, at her suggestion, a little in advance of tea-time, to avoid interruption. She received him with that habitual tact which managed in the same words to mark a dozen different shades of intimacy, with as many different people, and immediately plunged into a perfunctory, hesitating discussion of the projected dinner.

Obviously, she was in the clutch of some great trouble. He had seen her for a moment that morning, gay and brilliant; now there was in her face a stupor of pain which her eyes supplemented by a look of furtive helplessness. Katherine had not naturally great courage or combativeness, and the high poise of commanding social position, or the stolid discipline of conventionality, were poor substitutes in the presence of real disaster. Her frail struggles made it all the more pitiful to Montresor, who, despite his rattle of commonplace detail, could not prevent some show of his own distressed sympathy. This naturally increased Katherine's emotion, and she seemed upon the point of breaking down, when a fortunate interposition momentarily rallied the automaton forces at her command. A plodding Dutch *deus ex machina*—an old "grandfather's clock"—gave one of those metallic "ahems" by which they call attention to the fact that their sedate announcement of the hour is about to begin. Katherine realized that in a short time five o'clock would be melodiously clanging, bringing the tea-tray, borne by the

butler, as punctual and wooden as if contrived by a sixteenth century clock-maker. In synchronous accord with its measured ticking, her features arranging themselves into a rigid expression of composure, by the time the hour and the man were due she conversed in such "silken terms precise," and, with hard hand, wrote her memoranda so correctly, that Montresor abandoned his hastily formed intention of immediate departure. Seeing that the brewing, with its familiar detail, still further steadied her, he lingered even after they had both finished their tea, although the feverish haste with which she drank would have been suggestive to one in a more tactful mood. But tact, the instinct for dealing with small emergencies, cannot take the place of that heart-inspiration which is needed for greater crises.

It would be idle to say what I think was Montresor's controlling motive at this moment. Pity cannot produce love, but when it is excited by those we love, merges into the other so overwhelmingly as to be indistinguishable from it. Suffice it to say that never before had he experienced such a mastering emotion as that which now bade him take his stand at her side, to defend her if he might, or soothe and console if he could. He felt himself puerile, vain and disloyal in his previous intercourse with her, and sought blindly to atone. Although any topic would have served, in the end, to express this mood, the one they chose made it seem more natural. She congratulated him upon his appointment to serve with the Joint Commission on Fisheries, then about to meet in Washington; and he confessed it meant a great deal to him, as it opened a career that, rightly and fortunately followed, ought to satisfy any ambi-

tion. Then he told her if he should have any success in the future, it would be due to his visit to America—to the friends who had made him realize how much in life was worth any man's strenuous endeavor, and that his previous feeble-handed plucking of those fruits only which were ready to drop from mere rottenness, had been miserably stupid; that when on the steamer she had told him he owed a duty of personal care to his father's Irish tenants, he had felt start within him a sympathy which could not be satisfied by casual expression, within the limits of Broadlands. Did she remember the occasion of saying it?—that last, glorious, moonlit evening of a voyage which had borne him so happily into a new world? When Katherine taxed herself with impertinent priggishness, and wondered he had forgiven such sermonizing, he interposed quickly, with gathering warmth, to tell her she had always been a help and an inspiration to him, even while he had seemed so petulantly childish, and he had not only made no return for this, but, perhaps, had shut himself off even from *saying* how much he wished to serve her—or defend her from trouble.

Katherine had need of friendly support, but the misgiving pleasure caused by his assurances renewed her previous agitation, and made her attempt at guiding conversation into commonplaces incoherently feeble. Seeing this, Montresor rose to take his leave, and Katherine, explaining that she did not feel quite well and thought she would go to her room, did not urge him to remain. Wishing to give him a promised address, she arose, and, in doing so a crumpled letter fell upon the floor. Instinctively, Montresor started forward to pick it up, when, with

a frightened, inarticulate cry, she interposed to prevent him—her trembling limbs bent beneath her, and, tottering, she would have fallen had he not caught her in his strong, protecting arms, where, for one of those immeasurable intervals of life, she lay helplessly sobbing. With over-matching emotion, and in a voice strong with virile ascendancy, merging itself into tender persuasion, Montresor told his love, and asked her to let it shield her from harm, and strive to return some of that happiness which her mere existence was to him. She strove feebly and incoherently to release herself, only to become more hopelessly dependent, and the hand he had grasped clung to his own in the very effort to free itself. Was it physical weakness, mere womanly instinct of surrender, or the full consent of a willing love, which answered Montresor's tingling nerves and eager gaze into the half-closed eyes?

"I know," he pleaded, "I seem brutal and selfish; but you can change it all—make me worthy, and my selfishness a virtue, if you will become a part of me—if you will be my wife."

Irresistibly impelled, he sought with a passionate kiss an answer from lips tremulous with unformed words. This or the word "wife," with all its unspoken definiteness, imparted new strength to Katherine, who, thrusting him from her, leaned against a table for support, and said, hurriedly—remorsefully:

"Oh—no—no—that can never be. I tried to stop you—indeed I did, but I felt so weak and—so in need of a friendly voice——"

"I'm not such a brute," broke in Montresor, "but that I know I'm one, and deserve your anger."

"Don't say that," she pleaded, a certain noble tranquillity coming to her. "No true woman could feel angry at those words. What more could a man say to show his belief and trust in her? But I reproach myself for being so heedless as not to spare you this pain."

"Serves me right," he said, "for seeking in a few months a gift I should spend years in trying to deserve."

There was a suggestion of tenacity, which she answered with a startled, charming frankness.

"Please promise me you will never again directly or indirectly—speak—in that way. It would make our friendship impossible—and that is very dear to me. To lose it would be a new distress I'm sure you would not like to put upon me."

"I promise faithfully to obey your wishes," Montresor answered, with cunning forethought.

"And never to speak upon that subject again," continued Katherine, with studied firmness.

When this had been doggedly complied with, Montresor pleaded:

"Now that I have given this supreme proof of my loyalty, may I not ask that you will try to find some way in which I can help you in any—in this thing which is troubling you? Of course, I know for advice you have your brother——"

He seemed again to touch a raw spot, for she started, and interrupted excitedly, almost imperiously:

"I do not wish my brother to know I have any trouble"; then added, with heedless desperation: "He nor no one else could help matters; no one—not even God—can undo an evil deed once it is done."



She gave him her hand and, bending low, he kissed it, and if he lingered over it his obedient homage was only more fully expressed. When he had left the room, looking back, he saw Katherine, who still leaned against the table; but her eyes were now fixed in unhoping misery upon the crumpled letter which lay upon the floor.

## CHAPTER XXV

### KATHERINE'S SECRET

FORTUNATELY for Montresor, he was at this time very busy with his work upon the Fisheries Commission, of which he was an attaché. Otherwise he might have reverted to a condition of morbid, imaginative resentment toward this new and more bewildering tangle in his relations with Katherine. He had been rejected—definitely; he accepted it, nay, more, he felt it. In remembering with irresistible glow that brief, passionate caress he had pressed upon Katherine's lips, he could not convince himself that they had repelled him, as, an instant later, her arms had done; yet, her very silence regarding this brutal advantage he had taken, and a look of relentless determination, told him it was the only kiss, out of millions he desired, which could ever be his—that never again could he come near enough to be denied. And never before had he felt the need of being nearer—to defend her from the doom heralded by that sinister, crumpled letter; he could almost remember that the thing crawled toward her, as she gazed at it in benumbed fear. He resolved, therefore, to stand by her, if not as a lover, then as a friend, fixing no limit of time to his loyalty.

Naturally, he speculated as to the nature of this calamity. Its effect had been too overwhelming to

be financial—unless, perhaps, it involved in disgrace some one near to her. It might be an aftermath of her husband's disreputable associations. For a moment he considered the possibility that John Rae was still alive, and, to avoid criminal prosecution, had passed his name on to a man dying in a remote Polish town, whose only identification had been by means of clothing and papers found upon his person. His mood now, however, was too calm and sane to long entertain so fanciful a theory. Not once did he attribute to Katherine herself the "evil deed" of which she had spoken.

As for the rest of us, we only saw a change in Katherine's looks and spirits, which some ascribed to malaria, easily remedied by a trip to Atlantic City; while others, maliciously, or with friendly deprecation, judged it might be caused by the increased intercourse observable between Beatrix and Montresor. Of course, the latter and Katherine could not, without great embarrassment, be alone together; and they avoided this with such tact that all others were completely deceived, ascribing it rather to a growing preference on his part for Beatrix's society. Whether this acute young woman shared such an opinion, I have never known.

Whatever theory her friends might have as to the cause of Katherine's depression, they all endeavored to banish it, in which effort the Professor, sympathetic and impulsive, was easily conspicuous. This was magnified by the fact, previously stated, that she had already shown him marked favor, in order to draw him off from too frequent companionship with Beatrix. I must confess my own mystifi-

cation was considerably augmented by a scene which Montresor and I witnessed at the Country Club.

After luncheon we delayed over a discussion about the Fisheries Commission, and then sought to re-join the other members of our party, who had scattered in an adjacent valley to look for wood violets, or edelweiss, I forget which. Following a path through the woods, I, who led the way, suddenly saw, in passing, a natural *allée*, the Professor seated upon a log, his head bowed upon his hands, and Katherine standing at his side, bending over him. Turning, I looked at Montresor, whose face was deeply flushed; and we silently pursued our way, which speedily brought us to the main group. When Katherine and the Professor joined us they were rather noisily witty, having found no violets, only an Indian flint arrowhead. When asked, "professionally," whether Cupid belonged to the Stone Age or the Iron Age, Donnelly replied, quickly: "To the Golden Age." He said it sarcastically, but might have meant it poetically.

The intimacy between Beatrix and Montresor became, in the gossips' eyes, more and more "obvious," or "flagrant," and one morning Miss Thompson, who, in a Lenten spasm, had called upon Mrs. Rae concerning a charity, managed to imply some very mischievous things regarding the flirtation, under pretense of having heard a "gossipy person" say so. They were sitting in the front drawing-room, unconscious that in the other, which was at right angles, they had trapped Beatrix, who, in a morning negligée was reading "A Princess of Thule" when she first heard their voices. Katherine showed much indignation at what was quoted; but, since this

might be construed as directed against that "gossipy person," Miss Thompson continued. When, however, she made a thinly veiled suggestion that Beatrix's going to stay with Katherine was the cleverest piece of all her naive strategy, it involved a charge of violating both friendship and hospitality—which could not be borne. There was a sharp swish, a rustle, the crash of a heavily bound book upon a parquet floor, and Beatrix, with disheveled hair, a radiant vision of wrath, stood before them.

"You Ananias!" was all she could gasp; but the antique dagger, used as a paper cutter, which she still grasped, gave to her outward appearance some further expression of tumultuous vengeance raging within. Miss Thompson, too much startled to deny the responsibility for what she had repeated, arose, and looked so unmistakably apprehensive that Beatrix said:

"Don't be afraid. I am that antediluvian creature called a lady, and, besides, have some regard for hospitality; although you don't think it—and don't understand it——"

Freed from physical fear, Miss Thompson interjected: "If I had known you were listening for some good of yourself, Miss Preston, I should not have quoted your friends, which was all I was doing."

"Backbiters are not friends, Miss Thompson; they are 'people we know.'" The scorn with which Beatrix used this constant Thompsonian phrase atoned for its deficiency as a retort. Katherine was instinctively so prompt in ringing for the butler, as Miss Thompson's movements indicated her departure, that it almost seemed to have caused it. When

she was gone, Beatrix hurried to her room, accompanied soothingly by Katherine.

"You don't believe what that creature said, do you?" Beatrix asked, indignantly.

"No—no," Katherine responded; although I think she might have stopped Miss Thompson sooner.

"Any one can see," Beatrix continued, a trifle vehemently, "he worships the ground you tread on, and don't care *that* for me——" snapping her fingers viciously. "And I don't care—in that way—for him—or any other man," she added, with merciless voice. "I'm glad I don't, for it seems to bring nothing but misery."

Katherine became so visibly distressed at this turn that the young girl, slipping an arm around her, said:

"Katherine, dear, I have seen for several weeks there is something worrying you; and I don't want to know what it is, only to tell you it seems to make me love you all the more."

The inevitable happened, and Katherine, worn with carrying her secret alone, shared it with Beatrix, seeking to be comforted and sustained by her warm sympathy and more resolute character. Incoherently told, its substance was this:

Katherine's father, whom she was accompanying on a tour through Europe, had been taken seriously ill at Posen, in northeastern Germany, and, when told he could not live, had insisted upon her immediate marriage with John Rae, her fiancé, who had already joined them. The engagement was of long standing; and, besides having his heart set upon the match, her father was now tortured in his dying hours by the thought that Katherine would be left

suddenly alone, far from her family, without any rightful protector; so she gave her consent, the reluctance of which was concealed—partially even from herself—by the stupefying grief and fear overwhelming her in Death's chill presence. They had not been married much more than a year when John Rae also died; and it was long after this that Katherine learned of his having had, as mistress, a Russian woman he met in Paris, and by whom he was known as John White, instead of by his full name, John White Rae.

When Katherine received the letter which Montresor had seen upon the floor, she found it was from a German lawyer of New York, who wrote, from San Francisco, that, being about to sail for the South Pacific, in desperate health, he thought it best to surrender to her the enclosed paper, which had been entrusted to him by her husband merely for safekeeping.

The enclosure, in a separate sealed envelope, was written in French in a minute handwriting. It was an agreement, dated Thursday, the 25th of July, 187—, at Konin, a small Russian town just across the frontier from Posen (and it was there that John Rae had been upon business when summoned to join Katherine and her father). It was signed by Anna Katinsky, and stated that the marriage which had taken place that same day between John White and herself was null and void, was so intended to be by both of them, and the ceremony had been performed solely to save her good name, and because she was in a dying condition. Further, it stated, John White had never in any way promised to marry her, and that in consideration of ten thou-

sand roubles, that day paid, she and her mother, who also signed, renounced all claims upon him whatsoever. Attached to this paper was another, certifying to the death of Anna the twentieth of the following month (August) and that of her mother about a year later.

The fact which appalled Katherine was that this marriage with Anna Katinsky, on the 25th of July, had taken place four days before her own, on the 29th, and, therefore, she (Katherine) had never been legally married to John White Rae. Her mind did not for one moment entertain the legal question raised by this distinct repudiation of the intention to marry; to her a marriage was a marriage—no secret reservation could nullify a ceremony which had called God and man to witness. But the full horror of her situation did not come to her until Montresor's growing warmth had shown his love surging toward her. How could she, with such a stain upon her name, let any honorable man even ask her to marry him, without feeling herself to be a treacherous adventuress? The only person she might have consulted about it was her brother, and she could not bring herself to do this. For Singleton had most strongly and influentially favored her marriage with Rae, so she was unwilling to augment his bitter self-reproach by a new and useless revelation. Limp with discouragement, she wrote, as a forlorn hope, to the official who had certified Anna Katinsky's death, asking for a duplicate, and also for a transcript of any record of the same person's marriage. She enclosed a ten-florin note and wrote in French, getting a prompt reply in the same language confirming the dates already given. There



was no escape—her marriage had been void, and she no wife.

When Katherine confided her story to Beatrix she thought it would show the impossibility of her own marriage with any man, and leave the other free from scruples if Montresor and she should become attached to each other. Her motive was a noble one, and thoroughly genuine; but the next day this was neutralized by a further confession. Whether she was relieved by Beatrix's blythe unconcern at all mention of Montresor's name, or repented of her self-denial and used a common piece of female strategy, or—as is most likely—yielded to a sudden impulse of weakness and desire to lean upon young strength, I do not know. With halting intimations and admissions, she told of Montresor's proposal, and how nothing but the knowledge of this concealed brand of shame had given her strength to thrust him from her, or deny his plea.

Even if I were sure that Beatrix ever had for Montresor the passion called love, I can understand that, with her tutelage in romantic sentiment, she would feel a positive pleasure in sacrificing herself to a friend who, in such dire distress, had shown so great a trust in her. Her first words were of awed amazement:

"Katherine, dear, it is just as if it were out of a novel."

"Or a newspaper," the other interjected. "Every day you can see an account of some man wrecking the life of two women in such a way."

Beatrix, whose disposition was combative, reasoned with her friend, trying to prove that she ought not to let this fraudulent act of Rae's mar her whole

future. She said the Russian's was nothing but a "mock marriage" and Katherine's the true one. Then she tried banter: said one of her own great-great-grandmothers had been married at Gretna Green, so she herself was no fit associate for respectable women! That neither Penelope nor Lucretia had been married by the Episcopal service; Adam, Eve, Abraham, David, Solomon—none of those who had the special guidance of the Lord had promised "forsaking all other to cleave only unto thee."

"The intention is the thing, Katherine, not the form. I have heard that in Japan the ceremony consists in a woman making a cup of tea for the man—fancy *yourself* in Japan! And somewhere in the Pacific she cooks a meal for him—if *you* married that way you would certainly be a widow the same day"—so she rattled on. In the midst of it Katherine asked earnestly, with perhaps a little irresolute hope in the bottom of her heart:

"Would you really feel it right to marry if you were in my place?"

"I wouldn't feel it right to marry under any circumstances; but my case is sporadic, and proves nothing." Beatrix's 'sporadic'—newly picked up—sounded specially careless and flippant.

"Upon your honor, dear," persisted Katherine, "would you marry with such a—blemish?" She had paused to select the mildest word she could find. Beatrix laid aside a photograph at which she had been taking an impressionist's squint—also recently acquired. Turning, she showed a tranquil, grave face, and eyes from which shone the courageous light of a high-spirited race. Taking the other's hand in her own, she said, with resolute, even voice:

"Katherine, I would rather die a thousand deaths."

All at once there came to the older woman, from these words, and at the firm touch of that light hand, which had imparted courage to many a timid horse, a feeling of intrepid steadfastness, freeing her from the torture of conflicting principles and longings—an inexpressible relief.

Characteristically, Beatrix now threw her whole soul into consoling and inspiring this unhappy heroine—for so she regarded Katherine—who gradually derived a certain enjoyment from the situation, with its large increase of self-approval. Between the two women the idea slowly evolved that it was due to Montresor that he should be informed by Katherine of the insuperable barrier severing them, and so find that dull relief which comes when the inevitable is accepted; as the poor woman had so strongly experienced in her own case.

This she did one day, with much adroitness, instancing it as a case she "knew about" of a man marrying a "horrid creature" he met in Paris, a few days before he pretended to marry the lady to whom he was engaged. When the truth dawned upon Montresor, his indignant resentment was mingled with, and obscured by, the sudden hope that, after all, Katherine loved him, and that this artificial obstacle might be easily brushed aside. But, when he tried to ignore the alias which had been used and plead directly, he was met with such an austere reminder of his promise as to make him desist. Not being entirely without resource, however, he described what he thought would be the feelings of the man who might meet and love this woman whom

Katherine "knew," and she, weakly surrendering to this flanking movement, told him, in return, what would be the other's feelings. It was pretty, but pathetic, the tender realism, the eloquence with which they clothed the shadowy fable.

The woman, Montresor thought, must love the man, if merely from pity, when she saw his suffering; for, with a torture greater than that of Midas, all his tangible world turned into the woman he loved, and yet he slowly starved to death of heart-hunger. Of such passionate conviction was his voice, that Katherine trembled with sympathy as she said:

"Even if the woman loved—all the more *because* she loved, it would be impossible to put such a stain upon his name."

"This," urged Montresor, "is no real stain—it's a mere goblin phantasm of the law. Many women endure real disgrace for the sake of the man they love."

"Because," said Katherine, with startling earnestness, "disgrace is the penalty which she, and she alone, pays in order to make the man she loves happy. But in the other case, she already has the disgrace, and would be putting it upon the man to gain her *own happiness*——"

This analysis was not so apparent to Montresor as the power of love to which Katherine paid homage. It irresistibly impelled him toward her, causing her to shrink with dismay and add, hurriedly, finally, having almost a regretful cadence in her voice: "Besides, she has taken a solemn oath not to marry him—or any man—with such a blot upon her."

Shocked and exasperated, Montresor urged hotly: "Better to break a thousand such oaths than one loyal heart."

"And yet," retorted Katherine, aggrieved, "it is not many weeks since you were angry with me because you thought I told a little fib about walking in G street with Mr. Robinson, when, really, I told nothing but the truth. The first time, I told you I had not walked with him that afternoon, and I had not. The next day you asked me if I could deny walking with him in G street, without mentioning any particular time; and I could not deny that, because a week before Mr. Robinson had joined me there. I would have explained this at the time but that you were so high and mighty and *suspicious*." Waxing wroth at the recollection, she continued, impetuously: "And now, after a solemn oath, you want me—to—to——" she stammered, blushing deeply, stiffened herself, and fiercely completed the sentence: "to agree—that a woman may break it, because some man thinks he fancies her."

Montresor thrilled with the confession, made by her momentary abandonment of collaboration, but realized she was in too sensitive a state for him to act upon it; so he replied earnestly, but without audacity:

"Not a man who fancies her, but one who, forsaking all others and all other things, would devote his life to making her forget every trouble—real or imaginary—in happiness."

His concluding word caught a tremulous echo in the nervous laugh with which she said:

"As eloquent as constant, this Mr. Harris—this puppet of yours." Her voice had no sharpness; it

was almost tender ; and the speech seemed like one of those light bubbles which float upon troubled waters, marking the current.

"If he is, indeed, a puppet," Montresor urged, resolutely, "he is one moved by my own heart-strings."

Immeasurably touched, Katherine no longer sought to screen her emotion with trivialities, and yet there was a fading shimmer of happiness in the sadness of her reply :

"We are all of us, I suppose, merely puppets moved by heart-strings—unless they have been broken." And in the many days following, these two, whether gay or serious, exchanged, beneath ordinary conversation, an undercurrent of sentiment, grew in intimacy, and glowed with the belief that their love was requited—or rather returned ; for before its requital stood an impassable barrier—sometimes it seemed only a foolish oath.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### BEATRIX'S SECRET

ONE afternoon Montresor, upon being ushered into the drawing-room, found Beatrix with Katherine, and the latter, after giving him his tea, said: "I wish you'd help me to find out Beatrix's secret. Ever since she returned from church this morning she has been bubbling over with excitement."

Beatrix denied this, and offered to let any one feel her pulse, but when Montresor said he had already noticed that "something was on," she exclaimed:

"And thou, Brute! Well, if you must know, out comes my secret." Saying which, she took from her pocket—they had pockets in those days—a check, somewhat crumpled, and waved it in the air. "*That* is a new party gown. To think I should live to have three of them—or rather two and three-quarters—this is to be shockingly smart, and, like the Sybilline Books, the more they take away from a gown the more they charge. George sent it to me and told me to get the most expensive one a hundred dollars would buy. Dear boy, I wonder where he got it? Won it shootin', I expect."

She did seem excited, and when she got a chance to speak apart, said to Montresor, in a low voice:

"Meet me at the Jackson statue in Lafayette Park to-morrow morning while Katherine is at church."



The Rendezvous in Lafayette Square



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**ASTOR, LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS**  
**R L**

It was their first rendezvous, and Montresor felt much curiosity as he sought it the next morning. Unlike most women, Beatrix was a little ahead of time. The sun was high and shone effulgently upon her fresh youth, which seemed so well in keeping with the beds of violets and the transparent green mantle that budding spring had thrown over the outlined symmetry of tree and shrub—a sweet and inspiring picture of virginal and vernal promise. When they had seated themselves she said:

“Mr. Montresor, have you kept true to your motto, Fortiter—Fideliter—?”

“Isn’t there something more to it?” he asked

“That depends,” was the answer. Then she went on: “Did you know that when we changed from the Julian Calendar to the Gregorian, Russia didn’t, but kept to the old style?”

She said it carefully, precisely, as a child does its lessons.

“I believe,” Montresor answered lightly, “that I heard some such statement at school; also, that the square of the hypotenuse is equal——”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” Beatrix interrupted.

“The conversation is to be one-sided in that respect, is it?” he asked.

“If you would use your wits,” she responded, her eyes dancing with excitement, “you would see that the Julian Calendar spells that last word—‘Feliciter.’”

“I never was good at anagrams.”

“Mr. Montresor, I always thought you were clever,” Beatrix said, a little impatiently.

“I can’t remember having ever said or done anything to give you that impression.”

"Don't you understand," said Beatrix, slowly and distinctly, "that in Russia, if you marry on the twenty-fifth of July, you are really married twelve days later?"

The truth began to dawn upon Montresor; but he put it away from him, saying, teasingly:

"Does that mean that you are going to marry Ourasoff on the twenty-fifth of July, and that you won't really be married until twelve days later?"

"It means that Anna Katinsky was really married, or pretended to be, twelve days later than Katherine thinks she was—and so eight days *after* Katherine herself."

He understood the whole thing now, and life sparkled with happiness; but, although this showed in his face, he did not burst into the rhapsodies Beatrix had expected.

"By Jove, you don't mean it! I never knew her name or where she was married. Mrs. Rae only alluded to her as 'a creature' her husband had met in Paris."

"Katherine," Beatrix interrupted, "has never looked at those papers after the first time. When I begged her to see them, she gave me the key of her desk, and said she would never touch them again, except to burn them. When I did see them, I was no wiser; and it was only yesterday M. Ourasoff told me that they celebrated Christmas twelve days later than we do, and afterward Professor Donelly explained it all to me."

"But," objected Montresor, "after all, the record may not have been in the old style."

"M. Ourasoff says they always are," Beatrix re-

plied, decisively. "Besides, I have tested it—how do you think I did that?"

"I haven't an idea," Montresor confessed, "unless you cabled over."

"And gave up my new gown?" retorted Beatrix. "Well, I would do that for—Katherine; but I know no one in Russia. I did better than that. You see, the record said the marriage was Thursday, twenty-fifth of July; and I knew that if the twenty-fifth of July in Russia was *twelve* days behind our twenty-fifth, it wouldn't come on the same day of the week. So, I took an almanac and counted on, and found that if their twenty-fifth was on Thursday, ours would be a Tuesday. Then, with the Dominican tables in my prayer-book I found, sure enough, the twenty-fifth of July, 187—, was not a Thursday, but a Tuesday, which proves it, doesn't it?"

"Do you know, I think that was very clever of you," said Montresor, in honest admiration.

"No," replied Beatrix, seriously, with appealing glance, "I did not think it out—it came to me as I opened my prayer-book at the Dominican tables."

She plainly regarded it as a heaven-sent inspiration, and Montresor felt a thrill of acquiescence. We do not distrust the gods when they come bearing gifts.

"Have you told Katherine?" he asked, the name coming unconsciously. Its use seemed to embarrass Beatrix as much as if he had been equally intimate with her own.

"No," she answered; "you should do that."

It did not require much penetration to perceive that this was a dutiful speech, and that she would really like very much to lay this offering upon the

altar of their friendship. So he insisted, and she finally consented.

For several days after this Montresor tried in vain to see Katherine alone; but she frustrated him at every turn, nor would she respond any longer to the indirect interchange of feeling which had solaced their separation. Her manner with him was more than diffident—it was one of resentful humiliation; yet the color returned to her cheek and happiness irresistibly welled up into her eyes.

One morning, however, when, after a chance meeting on Pennsylvania Avenue, Montresor had accompanied Beatrix home, she, noticing indications that Katherine was probably in the drawing-room arranging flowers, sent him there, while she herself went up to change her gown. As she passed in, she turned and watched him from the stairway with an ineffable blending of childish mischief and wistfulness in her face.

Going toward the farther drawing-room to deposit a roll of music given to him, Montresor became conscious of an indefinable expectation; yet his heart beat suddenly, almost with panic, as, upon parting the fallen portière, he saw Katherine, who was even more startled—but not with fright. The full splendor of her beauty had returned to her, and she stood framed by arching palms and feathering, velvety ferns, her white gown of soft material clinging lovingly to the outlines of a perfect figure. She held in one hand a rare silver vase containing a single magnificent rose, toward which her head had been slightly bent, as if meeting its fragrance, but half turned as she became conscious of Montresor's presence. He noted every detail, "the folds which confess," the ex-

quisite white symmetry of the half-raised arm, disclosed by the open sleeve, and the lovely face, with its look of dismay and welcome. When he had explained his presence, incoherently, he advanced and, retaining the hand she gave him, asked, earnestly, gently: "Will you release me from my promise?"

"No—no—how can I?" she replied, trembling.

"After all," he pleaded, "the question I would ask does not need words."

"And does the answer need them?" she murmured, looking at him with grave frankness; and the light he had seen for a brief moment on the bridge at Cabin John now shone in her eyes, with full trust, never to fade until death did them part.

Of course, in the early days of their engagement Katherine and Montresor indulged in "making their past lives an open book"—more or less considerably expurgated. In the hasty outline sketch given of his flirtation with Mrs. Morton, Montresor, like a gentleman, did not put the blame upon the woman—but Katherine naturally did it for him, adding that it could not have lasted long, in any event, as he did not have enough money; for, to know Mrs. Morton, if not—to quote Steele speaking of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu—"a liberal education," was at least an education in liberality—a species of learning which Mr. Sibley was just then receiving with grave docility.

Although conscious of her own blameness, Katherine turned a page relating to the Professor with some foolish misgivings. She confessed that he had always interested her. His alternate moods of scoffing gayety and sad, earnest thought, the simple heart which drew animals and children, joined

with a brain acknowledging nothing which could not be demonstrated, and, most of all, the knowledge, which had recently come to her, that his wife, whom he had married from compassion, and saved from consumption, was addicted to morphine, kept her constantly thinking about him. Feeling his attraction, she had dreaded it for Beatrix; and, that day in the woods near the Country Club, she warned him of the danger—perhaps exaggerating it purposely—and asked him to go away. He turned ashy pale, and, in a voice dry with emotion, said:

“I would rather be struck dead than bring trouble to that child.”

Then he told her of how, years before, one day out in the Western mountains, as he was walking along pondering upon an intricate problem, he felt a warm, little hand placed confidently in his own and heard a childish voice say: “Will you show me where the butterflies live?”

It was a little girl with eyes of twilight’s mysterious blue, and hair that, as it waved about her upturned face, seemed a part of the golden sunshine that drifted through the valley, stirring into gentle motion undulating masses of wildflower by its tranquil eddies, and in which countless butterflies lazily splashed their gaudy wings.

From that moment he took the child into his heart, making her his daily companion.

“She was so loving and generous and brave,” he said, “and asked me such innocently wise questions, which I tried to answer as her dead mother would have done. Her father was a clerk for that beast Thompson, and, when the winter came, accepted without question, as part of his pay, some blankets—

second-hand they were—which had been bought from the Indians, and she sickened with scarlet fever.”

He described the long, agonizing battle for her life, in which he did not rest by night or day, making desperate rides for doctors or medicines, forcing others to do their duty at the point of a pistol; and, at last, cowed and broken, on his knees, in the valley where he had met her, pouring out prayers, answered by flippanant echoes from a rocky cliff.

“She died, and all that was good went out of me—even the wish to wish I were good. And now you think I may bring a greater blight than death on another fresh young life—I shall be called to the West, then to the Pacific—and on, and shall not come back until you say there is no danger of—any one caring too much for me.”

“I was crying already, Arthur,” said Katherine, “and he seemed so desolate that I went over and kissed him on the forehead.”

“I saw you,” said Montresor, deeply moved for his friend, “and I’m glad you did it.”

When Katherine expressed the hope that Beatrix had never cared for Montresor, except in the beaten way of friendship, he scoffed at the idea with that conscious manner which intimates that Monsieur Sans Merci has been merciful:

“Oh, no—we’ve only been jolly good friends. I don’t remember to have ever seen her take anything to heart, except one night at Sudley, after those other women had been pecking at her.”

Katherine moved the hundredth of an inch from him. “So, it was you who stared at her in her bedroom in—that peculiar costume?”



"Was it peculiar—for a bedroom?" Montresor retorted. "Besides, I didn't stare, but got away as soon as I decently could."

"*Immediately* would have been most decent," Katherine insisted, starting Montresor upon that course of carefully worded explanation, the exaction of which prevents a good woman from seeming entirely angelic. But I doubt if he ever confessed how pretty Beatrix looked *en jupon* in his recurrent visions, nor of how often he thought of her alone and wistful upon the great portico at Sudley—or, peering into the future, saw her meet bitter trials with an undaunted smile that was eventually one of triumph.

Then Katherine grew sentimental, and said he would not be willing to go off with her "to some distant little island"; at which, with robustious gaiety, he suggested England.

"I don't believe you care for anything except that I'm not positively ugly—did I look passably well that night at the Mi Carême ball?"

"Didn't you see the result?" Montresor asked.

"You know," Katherine continued, "Pascal says that the difference of half an inch in the length of Cleopatra's nose would have altered the world's history? Would a difference in my nose have altered history?"

"No; it would only have altered the standard of beauty." This was said so ardently that Katherine blushed, and asked, wistfully:

"Will you remember that when I grow old and have wrinkles?"

"You will never have wrinkles—only ripples, or dimples long drawn out."

Thus, the only palpable result of Montresor's seven months' residence in Washington was securing a beautiful and charming American wife—a very commonplace achievement. But, unknown even to his friends, a great deal more had happened:

He had completely checkmated the suit against a valuable piece of Lady Broadlands' property; although the foundations for this had been laid by MacManus' investigations, without which the inductive reasoning leading to the decisive clue would have been impossible to Montresor. But MacManus became a factor still more weighty in Montresor's life.

For it turned out that he had been a former tenant upon Lord Broadlands' estates who had been unjustly evicted. Such, however, was his innate Irish loyalty to the family that when Robinson wished his aid in the suit against Lady Broadlands, he flatly refused; and, being befriended by Montresor after his accident, he sought, through Father Vincent, a position in which he could show his gratitude. This led not only to cordial relations between the two, but, eventually, to an entirely different condition of affairs upon Lord Broadlands' Irish estate; and the popularity thereby accruing to Montresor was of great service to him in his subsequent political career.

His confidential letters to his cousin cleared away previous misconceptions as to the real attitude of great public men in America toward the Irish question, and showed it was simply the same which they would have taken had they been British citizens, being divided solely by their views of right and wrong. These same letters were continued when he became

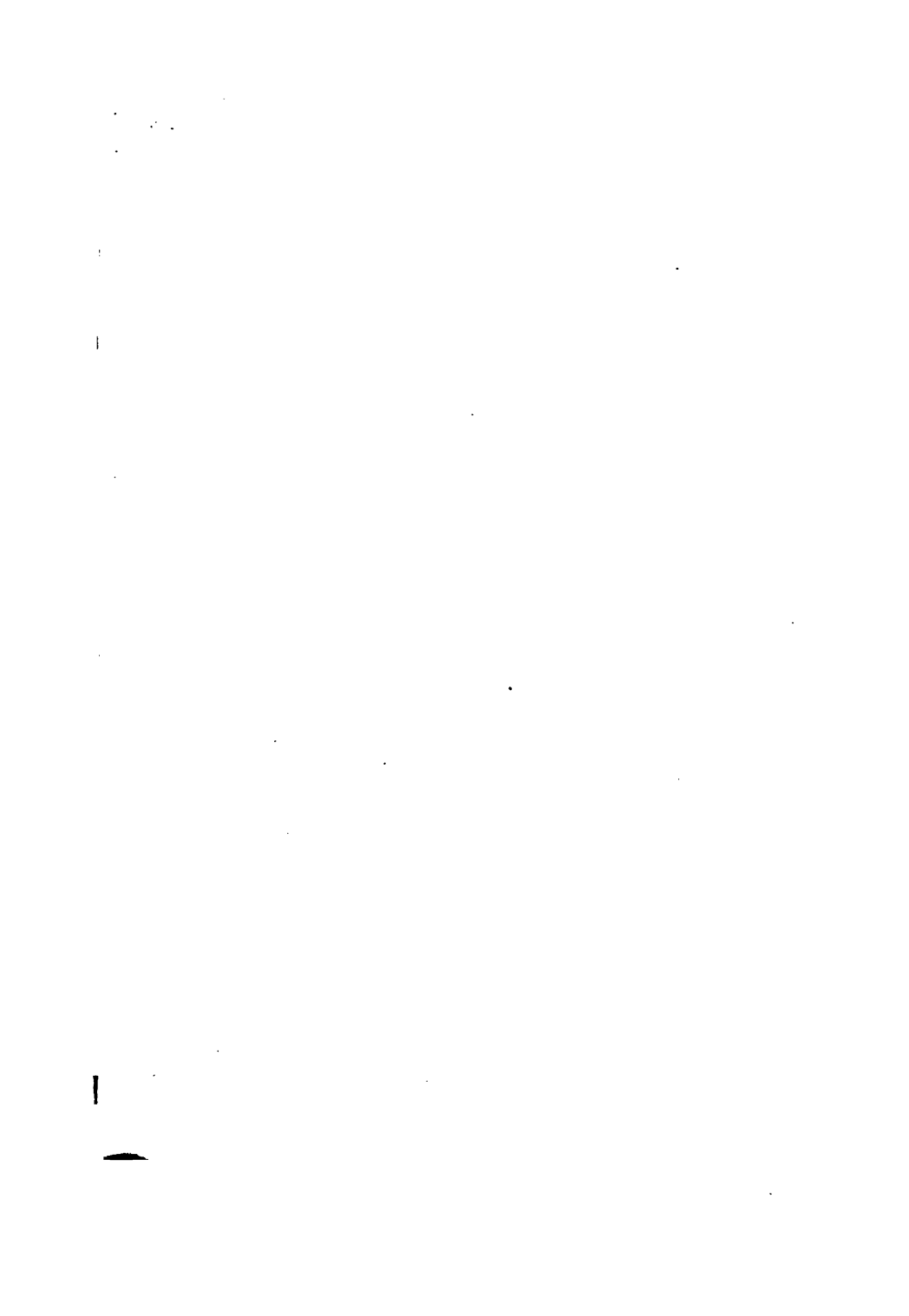
a subordinate member of the Fisheries Commission; and, reflecting as they did the liberal view resulting from his intimacy with Ronderson and Singleton, I cannot but think they influenced the moderation displayed by the English Government. I remember hearing, later, an exalted English politician use the exact phrase which Montresor had quoted to me as Senator Ronderson's: "Consider the treaty not as a diplomatic 'modus vivendi,' but as the means of livelihood for those poor fishermen, be they Americans, English, or French."

And now, when to amuse myself upon a long ocean voyage, I have elaborated these notes from my diary, I find myself still unable to decide whether Robinson ever entertained sinister designs against Montresor. That he was a prominent member of some Fenian organization was most probable; but, as he sailed for South America two days after his hasty departure from Singleton's residence and was drowned on the way out, we never actually knew if he was the dishonest Fenian mentioned in the mysterious newspaper paragraph. The attack on ship-board might have been the practical joke of some groggy sailor, and the discharge of Robinson's gun really an accident. To such views of the matter Montresor became more and more reconciled as time obscured the recollection of the hatred he fancied he had seen in the other's eyes. But I have no doubt about the benefit to Montresor's character which resulted from the belief that he was being plotted against. He was stung into an aggressive energy he had never before shown, and it launched him upon a path of brilliant success.

After all, cannot the figments of the brain call for

as true courage, resource and endurance as material foes? Don Quixote righting imaginary wrongs; Curtius leaping into the chasm with the fancy he could thereby save Rome; the Spartan youth allowing his vitals to be devoured rather than commit the sin of being *caught* in theft; and the saint being burned in defense of some dogma, now ignored by his church, were all courageous heroes ready to die in obedience to the laws of an ideal world. Could we but look into the innermost thoughts of those who are the prophets and the leaders of mankind, it would be found that for each thrilling utterance or great exploit, gaining expression in the open field, they have been prepared and stimulated by a dozen in the realms of their imagination.

Still, let me confess that all I have written is: Montresor married a wife. Is it not enough? He himself inclined to that opinion as, some years later, after his marriage, when honors had come to him, he stood at the side of a fragile cradle. Musing upon the growth of man's empire—first the family, then the tribe, then the nation—his mind eventually retraced its path, and he thought that England summoned her great men in Parliament, gathered her legions bristling with steel, and sent forth, upon their path of silent menace, those grim, iron monsters of the deep—all, only that a helpless child might slumber undisturbed.





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